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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

March 2002

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Editorial Office:

Prabuddha Bharata

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat

Dt. Champawat 262 524, Uttaranchal

E-mail: p-b@indiatimes.com

Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama

5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014

Phones: 91+33+2440898/2452383/2164000

Fax: 2450050 • E-mail: pb@advaitaonline.com

Cover: Swami Vivekananda's Temple at Ramakrishna Math, Belur



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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No. 3

Traditional Wisdom

THE DIVINITY WITHIN

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषोऽन्तरात्मा सदा जनानां हृदये सन्निविष्टः

तं स्वाच्छरीरात्प्रवृहेन्मुञ्जादिवेधीकां धैर्येण ।

तं विद्याच्छुक्रममृतं तं विद्याच्छुक्रममृतमिति ॥

The indwelling Self called Puruṣa and of the size of a thumb, resides in the heart of all beings. One should with discrimination separate the Puruṣa from the body like separating the central stalk from the *muñja* grass. Know Him to be pure and immortal. Yea, know Him to be pure and immortal. (*Kāthopaniṣad*, 2.3.17)

यः सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन् सर्वेभ्यो भूतेभ्योऽन्तरो यं सर्वाणि भूतानि न विदुर्यस्य सर्वाणि भूतानि शरीरं

यः सर्वाणि भूतान्यन्तरो यमयत्येष त आत्मान्तर्याम्यमृतः ... ॥

He who inhabits all beings, yet is within all of them, whom no being knows, whose body all beings are, and who controls them from within, is the inner Controller, your own immortal Self.... (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.7.15)

The human body is like a pot, and the mind, the intellect and the senses are like water, rice and potato. When you place a pot containing water, rice and potato on fire, they get heated, and if anyone touches them, his finger is burnt, even though the heat does not really belong to the pot, or the water, or the potato or the rice. Similarly, it is the power of Brahman in man that causes the mind and his intellect and the senses to perform their functions; and when that power ceases to act, these also stop work. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 33-4)

After long searches here and there, in temples and churches, in earths and heavens, at last you come back, completing the circle from where you started, to your own soul and find that He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, on whom you were looking as the mystery of all mysteries shrouded in the clouds, is nearest of the near, is your own Self, the reality of your life, body, and soul. (*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 5-6)

This Month

This month's editorial, 'The Three-stranded Rope', discusses the three constituents of nature, their binding power, and the way to free ourselves from their hold.

In 'Sri Ramakrishna—Jesus Christ Come Again' Swami Mukhyanandaji, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, argues—with incidents from the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda—that the second coming of Christ is something that has already happened with Sri Ramakrishna's advent. Known for his deep scholarship, and having a number of books to his credit, the author is presently at the Ramakrishna Order's headquarters at Belur Math, Howrah.

In the second and concluding part of his travelogue 'Pilgrimage to Europe', Swami Gokulanandaji narrates his experiences in Bindweide, Berlin, France and Amsterdam.

The answers to questions under 'Religion and Life' are spontaneous responses from Srīmat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj (twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order) to devotees' queries and doubts. His recorded answers—and the subsequent transcript—have his approval.

'Religious Harmony, the Need of the Hour' is excerpted from Dr Radhakrishnan's lecture delivered in Tamil Nadu in 1958. Brilliantly presenting the salient features of major world religions, the great philosopher-statesman emphasizes that con-

cord between religions is the need of the hour. Subheadings have been added wherever necessary. The article originally appeared in an old issue of the now defunct journal *The Indo-Asian Culture*.

In this issue we begin a new feature titled 'Glimpses of Holy Lives'—containing inspiring incidents from saints who lived, moved and had their being in God. Incidents from the lives of some Azhvars—Tamil Vaiṣṇava saints—are featured this month.

In 'Spirituality and the Feminine' Pravrajika Gayatriprana, a nun of the convent attached to the Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA, discusses in detail five different domains of the feminine, and how spirituality could be cultivated in each domain.

Swami Harshanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, and a gifted writer in English, Kannada and Sanskrit, discusses the salient features of the fourth Veda in 'The *Atharva-veda*—A Study'.

Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math, presents the second and concluding part of his translation of 'Bhikṣukopaniṣad'. The notes are based on the commentary by Upanishad Brahmayogin.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

WHAT IS VEDANTA?

A student of Vedanta does not belong to any sect, creed, or denomination. He is neither a Christian, nor a Mohammedan, nor a Buddhist, nor a Jain, nor a Hindu; yet in principle he is one with all. He can go to a church, a mosque or a temple. He is a follower of that nameless and formless Eternal Religion, which underlies all special religions of the world; and as he grows into a deeper and deeper understanding of this universal religion, he cannot but declare, as did Professor Max Müller, 'Vedanta has room for almost every religion; nay it embraces them all.' And so it must, because its whole teaching is based on those all-inclusive words of the Blessed Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'Whosoever comes to me through whatsoever path, I reach him; all men are struggling in the paths which ultimately lead to Me, the Eternal Truth.'

—from the article by Swami Abhedananda, March 1902

The Three-stranded Rope

EDITORIAL

Swami Vivekananda was at his best in the Thousand Island Park. It was here that he trained selected disciples, initiated them into spiritual life, and gave them his choicest teachings. It was here again that he composed that classic poem, 'The Song of the Sannyasin'—a masterpiece on renunciation. An important verse in that immortal poem is of great significance:

Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend,
 this world
Nor that can give. In books and temples vain
Thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds
The rope that drags thee on. Then cease
 lament,
Let go thy hold, Sannyasin bold! Say—
 ‘Om Tat Sat, Om!’ ¹

Though this song refers to the life of a recluse, others too will derive as much benefit by understanding the verse. Sri Ramakrishna advocated mental renunciation for his householder disciples, and showed them the way by leading a householder's life himself—a life with a difference, with his renunciation and purity intact, his wife being a willing participant in his mission of turning humanity towards the one goal of life: God-realization. Saying that he had done sixteen parts, Sri Ramakrishna would encourage us to do at least one part. In any case, the rope drags not only the monk but also others. So it should be welcome if we can learn to give up the hold on the rope that drags us, and become free.

Doesn't it appear strange that we ourselves hold the rope that drags us on? It shouldn't if we see what the rope is, and why and where we are dragged.

Purusha and Prakriti of the Sāṅkhya

Sāṅkhya, one of the six systems of Indian philosophy, propounds two realities.

Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is the conscious principle, equivalent to Brahman/Atman in the Vedanta, the basic spiritual Reality behind the universe and living beings. Prakriti is the insentient principle, known as nature. Prakriti is composed of three *guṇas*—meaning strands, not qualities. The *guṇas* are the building blocks of Prakriti, even as the three strands of a rope. Minus the strands, there is no rope. Similarly, minus the *guṇas*, there is no Prakriti. Prakriti, by the mere presence of Purusha, has given rise to the mental and physical universe—both outside the human system and inside. Perhaps, it is this three-stranded rope called Prakriti that Swamiji refers to in his poem: Prakriti drags us towards it—away from Purusha, our real nature—as long we hold fast to it.

We need a deeper study of what is in us that gets entangled to Prakriti, and what Prakriti itself is—what these *gunas* are.

The Nature of the *Gunas*, the Three Strands

Everything in the world produces three kinds of reactions in us: pleasure, pain and indifference. Thus a painting arouses joy in the painter, pain in the observer possibly by what the picture depicts, and indifference in the salesman whose only concern is to sell it. Similarly, a beautiful flower delights the youth, produces pain in a dying man and indifference in the gardener. Cricket: A match produces joy in the winners and in those who root for them, pain in the losers and their supporters, and indifference in a person who has something else to do than watching a cricket match.

Going by the rule of cause and effect, what is found in the effect must be found in the cause too. That leads us to the inference that the ultimate cause of things—Prakriti here—should also be composed of the three elements, pleasure, pain and indifference. These elements are

respectively *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These three strands of Prakriti are inseparable, though distinct. They are shining examples of unity in diversity. Another example given by Sāṅkhya is an oil lamp. Despite being essentially different, oil, wick and flame coexist to form a lamp. Each *guṇa* struggles perpetually for preponderance over the other two. That explains the variety in creation.

The five basic elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth) called *tanmātras*—literally ‘that alone’—evolve from these *guṇas*. The mind, the vital principle called *prāṇa*, five sense organs, five motor organs and the physical body are all evolutes of Prakriti, the three *guṇas*. Thus, Prakriti, the insentient principle, is responsible for imposing the world of names and forms on the sentient principle, Purusha, by virtue of its proximity. In the undifferentiated state of Prakriti, the three *guṇas* are in equilibrium—they fully counterbalance one another. Thus there is no rest in Prakriti. The Purusha—the Self—of course, remains unaffected by the movements and transformations in the *guṇas*.

In Vedānta, Prakriti is called *maya*, the divine power of Brahman, the equivalent of Sāṅkhya’s Purusha. The main difference between the two systems is this: Sāṅkhya recognizes many Purushas, as many as there are individual beings; Vedānta accounts for only one Purusha, called Brahman (behind the universe of names and forms) or Atman (behind the body and mind of a living being). Minus the names and forms including the mind, the spiritual Reality behind the universe and that behind a living being are the same. According to the famous Vedantic equation (*mahāvākya*), ‘*ayamātmā brahma*, this Atman is Brahman’, Brahman and Atman are identical.²

It is enough for our study to remember that our real nature is divine, the Atman, and anything other than that—our mind, sense organs, the body and the sense objects, the objects of perception by the senses—is composed of the *guṇas*. Every one of us is a bundle of these *guṇas*, with one of them preponderant

over the other two. Thus we have three kinds of people: the calm, the active and the inert, in whom *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* respectively prevail over the other two.

There is a detailed discussion on these in the fourteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. We paraphrase here some of the points, along with some in the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

Sattva: It is stainless, luminous and healthful. It binds us by creating attachment to happiness and knowledge. The sense of satisfaction, joy and happiness one experiences is produced by *sattva*. When the light of knowledge shines through the gateways of the body, then it may be said that *sattva* has prevailed.

Rajas: It is full of passion and is the cause of thirst and attachment. It binds fast the embodied soul by attachment to action. *Rajas* is the principle of activity in things. It always moves and makes other things move too. Greed, activity, enterprise, unrest, longing—these arise when *rajas* prevails. It is because of *rajas* again that the senses follow their respective sense objects.

Tamas: It is born of ignorance, and deludes all embodied beings. It binds fast by inadvertence, indolence and sleep. Darkness, indolence, inadvertence, delusion—all these arise when *tamas* prevails.

Thus, *sattva* binds one to happiness and *rajas* to action. *Tamas* veils knowledge and binds one to inadvertence. *Sattva* is characterized by white (calmness), *rajas* by red (passion) and *tamas* by black (ignorance).

Sri Ramakrishna on the *Guṇas*

It is easy to understand the binding power of the *guṇas* from Sri Ramakrishna’s brilliant parable:

Once a rich man was passing through a forest, when three robbers surrounded him and robbed him of all his wealth. After snatching all his possessions from him, one of the robbers said: ‘What’s the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him.’ Saying this, he was about to strike their victim with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him and said: ‘There is

no use in killing him. Let us bind him and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Accordingly the robbers tied him with a rope, left him, and went away.

After a while, the third robber returned to the rich man and said: 'Ah! You're badly hurt, aren't you? Come I'm going to release you.' The third robber set the man free and led him out of the forest. When they came near the highway, the robber said, 'Follow this road and you will reach home easily.' 'But you must come with me too', said the man. 'You have done so much for me. We shall all be happy to see you at our home.' 'No,' said the robber, 'it is not possible for me to go there. The police will arrest me.' So saying, he left the rich man after pointing out his way.

Now, the first robber, who said: 'What is the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him', is *tamas*. It destroys. The second robber is *rajas*, which binds a man to the world and entangles him in a variety of activities. *Rajas* makes him forget God. *Sattva* alone shows the way to God. It produces virtues like compassion, righteousness, and devotion. Again, *sattva* is like the last step of the stairs. Next to it is the roof. The supreme Brahman is man's own abode. One cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman unless one transcends the three *gunas*.³

The three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—have men under their control. They are like three robbers. As long as *sattva* exists, it calls on *rajas* for help; and *rajas* can get help from *tamas*.⁴

The Goal of Life

The Upanishads and the great ones who manifested the truths they contain proclaim in one voice that our real nature is divine, the Atman; to know the Atman is the goal of life. How the Atman or Purusha came to be associated with Prakriti, the insentient and the ever-active is a question that naturally comes to our mind. Swami Vivekananda would say that the question cannot be logically formulated. That is because we ask this question from within the domain of ignorance—ignorance of our real nature. How did the Perfect come into the contact with the imperfect can merit answer only if our vantage point equally

commands the view of both the Perfect and the imperfect. No question about the Perfect from a vantage point located in the realm of the imperfect can ever be logical. But when one knows the Perfect, the Atman, the question will not arise because the questioner will have then transcended the question. All knots in the heart are rent asunder by the knowledge of the Atman.⁵ Secondly, when somebody is hit by an arrow, finding a cure for the wound is more important than looking for who shot the arrow.

Swami Vivekananda says that divinity is hidden in us, and the goal is to manifest this potential divinity. In other words, the less our association with Prakriti (nature), the more the manifestation of Purusha, our divine nature. Does our association with Prakriti, nature, diminish of its own? Hardly. Our senses and the mind are created in such a way that they always look outward. The five sense organs—ears, skin, eyes, tongue, nose—are ever ready to come into contact with their respective sense objects. The mind and 'I' too get carried away by the pull of the sense objects. Only a few persons endowed with discrimination and the desire for immortality are able to perceive the Atman by directing their senses inward.⁶

Struggle with Nature

How to manifest this divinity? Swamiji says it is to be done 'by controlling nature, external and internal'.⁷ External nature is clear to us. But struggle with it? That's what the scientist does. All his discoveries and inventions are the result of his struggle with external nature. Stressing the importance of this struggle, Swamiji says:

This Maya [Prakriti, nature] is everywhere. It is terrible. Yet we have to work through it. The man who says that he will work when the world has become all good and then he will enjoy bliss is as likely to succeed as the man who sits beside the Ganga and says, 'I will ford the river when all the water has run into the ocean.' The way is not with Maya, but against it. This is another

fact to learn. We are not born as helpers of nature, but competitors with nature. We are its bond-masters, but we bind ourselves down. Why is this house here? Nature did not build it. Nature says, go and live in the forest. Man says, I will build a house and fight with nature, and he does so. The whole history of humanity is a continuous fight against the so-called laws of nature, and man gains in the end.⁸

Internal nature refers to the nature of our mind—its desires, likes, dislikes, motives and the like—in short, our past experiences stored in our mind as impressions, *samskāras*. As long as man does not realize that he is bound, there is no question of his seeking freedom. Sri Ramakrishna classifies human beings into three types: the ever-free, the struggling and the bound.

Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in the mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.⁹

When we realize the bondage and think of freedom, however, we see the necessity of waging a war with the mind, as it were. A little reflection will reveal to us how free we really are. Suppose we sit with a book in hand with an hour to spare. Assuming that there is no external disturbance, how long are we able to concentrate on the book? Probably a few minutes. Students with untrained minds will vouch for that! Even so with our attempts at meditation. How many seconds during a ten-minute attempt at meditation does our mind concentrate on the object of meditation

or the name of God? The mind starts thinking on something past or something to occur in the future. It hardly settles on the present, the task in hand. It is thus evident that even without any external disturbance, we are not that free to concentrate the mind on what is before us. Let us hear Swamiji:

Free! We who cannot for a moment govern our own minds, nay, cannot hold our minds on a subject, focus it on a point to the exclusion of everything else for a moment! Yet we call ourselves free. Think of it! We cannot do as we know we ought to do even for a very short space of time. Some sense-desire will crop up, and immediately we obey it. Our conscience smites us for such weakness, but again and again we do it, we are always doing it. We cannot live up to a high standard of life, try as we will. The ghosts of past thoughts, past lives hold us down. All the misery of the world is caused by this slavery to the senses. Our inability to rise above the sense-life—the striving for physical pleasures, is the cause of all the horrors and miseries in the world.¹⁰

Need for Mind Training

Indeed, 'we cannot do as we know we ought to do even for a very short space of time.' That is because the mind that has not been disciplined does not cooperate with us, acts as our enemy, against our interest. When trained and disciplined, the mind acts as our friend¹¹ and teaches us how to proceed further. So the problem reduces to training the mind.

We need to recapitulate certain points we discussed earlier: the mind is basically a product of the three *guṇas*, and *tamas* is at the lowest rung of the ladder, characterized by sloth, indifference and delusion. From Sri Ramakrishna's parable we understand that *sattva* alone can show us the way to God. All the three *guṇas* exist together in a person, one of them trying to gain preponderance over the other two. The challenge, therefore, lies in cultivating *sattva*. But one important point merits our attention here: *tamas* and *sattva* are two look-alike extremes. Thus the apparent calm-

ness born of inactivity and sloth could be mistaken for *sattva*. The apparent joy born of postponement, laziness and excessive sleep could be mistaken for the *sattva* variety. Nothing could be more delusive, thanks to *tamas*, the deluder! Swamiji warns:

Many people think they are Sattvika by nature, but they are really nothing but Tamasika. Many living in an uncleanly way regard themselves as Paramahansas! Why? Because the Shastras say that Paramahansas live like one inert, or mad, or like an unclean spirit. ... The quickest and gentlest vibrations of light are both beyond the reach of our ordinary vision; but in the one it is intense heat, and in the other it may be said to be almost without any heat. So it is with the opposite qualities of Sattva and Tamas. They seem in some respects to be the same, no doubt, but there is a world of difference between them. The Tamoguna loves very much to array itself in the garb of the Sattva.¹²

Sattva is calmness in the midst of activity, quite different from the apparent calmness born of inactivity. So, the way to *sattva* from *tamas* is through *rajas*, intense activity. Thus, training the mind to work without attachment to the results is the first step towards this journey from *tamas* to *sattva*. Irrespective of the nature of the work in hand the whole mind needs to be trained to concentrate on it. No duty is to be despised. What is important is how we do them. Let us hear Swamiji again:

His manner of doing them and his power to do them are indeed the test of a man. A shoemaker who can turn out a strong, nice pair of shoes in the shortest possible time is a better man, according to his profession and his work, than a professor who talks nonsense every day of his life. Every duty is holy, and devotion to duty is the highest form of the worship of God; it is certainly a source of great help in enlightening and emancipating the deluded ...¹³

The *Bhagavadgītā* teaches us that in any work it is Prakriti and its *gunas* that are at play. Only an egotistic fool thinks that he is the doer. But a man who knows the truth about the *gunas* and action, and what is different from them, knows that it is the *gunas* that are mutu-

ally at play, and is thus unattached to work.¹⁴ And again the Lord says (13.29): 'He who understands that Prakriti is responsible for various actions and sees the Atman to be the non-doer—such a person really sees.'

Devotion to God Helps 'Let Go the Hold'

How to free oneself from the effects of one's work? By devotion to God. Sri Krishna shows us how to do that, how to deify work: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give in charity, and whatever austerities you perform—do it as an offering to Me. Thus you will be freed from the good or evil results of your work. With your mind firmly established in the yoga of renunciation, you will become free and come to Me' (9.27).

It is the concealing power of *maya* or the *gunas* that makes people forget God. Sri Krishna says that deluded by the three *gunas*, people fail to recognize Him, who is beyond the *gunas* and immutable. He further describes this *maya* of His as divine, consisting of the *gunas*, and difficult to overcome. Only those who take shelter in Him cross over *maya* (7.13-4).

Sri Ramakrishna teaches us how to pray to be rid of *maya*: 'O Rama! ... I am Thy servant. I have taken refuge in Thee. Grant, O Rama, that I may have pure love for Thy lotus feet; that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching *Maya*!'¹⁵

Need to Begin from Where We Are

In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā* Sri Krishna catalogues a threefold list of qualities based on *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The catalogue includes three types of worshippers, food, sacrifice, austerities, charity, renunciation of work, knowledge, work, worker, intelligence (*buddhi*), fortitude (*dhr̥ti*) and happiness. A study of this classification can greatly help us assess our present state of mind and begin our spiritual journey from there.

At the end of the fourteenth chapter, Sri

Krishna describes the characteristics of a person who has transcended the *guṇas* (*triguṇātita*)—a knower of God. Commenting on the utility of the qualities of a man of steady wisdom described in the second chapter, Sri Sankara says that ‘the characteristics of the man of realization are to be considered as disciplines for the aspirant, as these characteristics are the result of effort’. The same comment applies to the characteristics of a *triguṇātita*.



To summarize. Though essentially divine, we are bound by nature, which is constituted by the three *guṇas* just as a rope, by its three strands. Nature drags us away from God, luring us in various ways by the play of its *guṇas*. The journey to freedom is from *tamas* to *sattva*, through *rajas*. Mind discipline, a proper attitude to one’s work so that it results in progressive detachment, and devotion—these are some important means to ‘let go the hold’ and become free.

Nature no longer holds sway over a free person—one who has realized his divine nature. In the words of Swami Vivekananda,

Nature’s task is done, this unselfish task which our sweet nurse, nature, had imposed upon herself. She gently took the self-forgetting soul by the hand, as it were, and showed him all the experiences in the universe, all manifestations, bringing him higher and higher through vari-

ous bodies, till his lost glory came back, and he remembered his own nature. Then the kind mother went back the same way she came, for others who also have lost their way in the trackless desert of life. And thus is she working, without beginning and without end. And thus through pleasure and pain, through good and evil, the infinite river of souls is flowing into the ocean of perfection, of self-realisation.¹⁶ *

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16. CW, 1.304.

Calmness in the Midst of Intense Activity

When someone asked him how should Sri Krishna be represented in the picture, Swamiji said, ‘Shri Krishna ought to be painted as He really was, the Gita personified; and the central idea of the Gita should radiate from His whole form’ So saying, Swamiji posed himself in the way Sri Krishna should be portrayed and said, ‘Look here, thus does he hold the bridle of the horses—so tight that they are brought to their haunches, with their forelegs fighting the air, and their mouths gaping. This will show a tremendous play of action in the figure of Shri Krishna. ... Now, tell me what idea this picture of the Preacher of the Gita conveys to you.’ The friend replied, ‘Activity combined with firmness and serenity.’ Swamiji was pleased at the reply and said, ‘Ay, that’s it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky.’

—CW, 7.273

Sri Ramakrishna—Jesus Christ Come Again

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

Christians all over the world have been looking forward to the ‘second coming of Jesus Christ’ when, ‘as projected in the Bible’, the ‘kingdom of God on earth’ will be established. ‘That will be a golden period in the history of humankind when all humans will exist peacefully, submitting to the will of the eternal Spirit’, writes a devout Christian.

When we go through the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of religious harmony, and of his immaculate spiritual consort Sri Sarada Devi, and his great disciples, Swami Vivekananda and others, impressions begin to gain ground that Jesus Christ has perhaps already come again in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. There are such striking similarities between the two which several thinkers and savants all over the world have begun to recognize and give expression to. He seems to be an amplified Jesus to suit the modern scientific age and globalization of humankind.

Let us consider the factors that lead one to such a conclusion.

1. Within ten years of Sri Ramakrishna’s *mahasamadhi* in 1886, his great life and universal message had spread all over the world, as it were, by Divine Will. It is said that with his advent the *satya yuga* or ‘the age of truth’ has dawned. Says Swami Vivekananda:

From the very date that he was born, has sprung the Satya Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there

was, belonged to another era. In this Satya Yuga the tidal wave of Sri Ramakrishna’s Love has unified all.¹

2. Sri Ramakrishna too was born, as detailed in his biographies, through immaculate conception by the infusion of Divine Power by Siva into Chandramani, his guileless and pure mother. When his father was in Gaya on a pilgrimage, Lord Vishnu told him in a dream that he would be born as a son to him.²

3. From his biographies and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,³ we learn that Jesus Christ entered and merged into Sri Ramakrishna at the end of his Christian sadhana. Similarly, during his varied spiritual sadhanas, other incarnations, prophets and various divine beings also merged into him. Hence Sri Ramakrishna is considered the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses. Several people affirmed seeing Jesus Christ in him during his lifetime.

4. There were also several incidents in his life resembling those in Christ’s life, like that of Martha and Mary⁴ and his debate as a young boy on religious matters with pundits. Like Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna too was divinely wise without formal education; frequently used parables in his teachings; and had to give up his body as a result of taking upon himself all the sins of humankind.

5. Sri Ramakrishna became a bounty of spiritual grace (*kalpataru*) and conferred spiritual vision freely on many devotees on 1 January 1886, the Christian New Year’s Day. Two of his eminent disciples, Swami Saradananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda (then known as Sharat and Shashi, respectively), were recognized by Sri Ramakrishna as the disciples of Jesus Christ. It is also noteworthy that on his visit to the Basilica of St Peter’s in Rome Swami Saradananda went into a trance. It is also significant that Sri Ramakrishna’s great

disciples took the vow of sannyasa at Antpur on Christmas Eve of 1886, when Narendranath dwelt on the life and renunciation of Jesus Christ, and described him as a great sannyasin.

6. Even during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime many declared him an incarnation of God. A few days before he passed away in *mahasamadhi*, he declared his avatarhood unambiguously to Narendra, clearing the last vestiges of doubt from his mind. Swami Vivekananda says:

... in the Ramakrishna Incarnation there is knowledge, devotion and love—infinite knowledge, infinite love, infinite work, infinite compassion for all beings. You have not yet been able to understand him. ... What the whole Hindu race has thought in ages, he *lived* in one life. His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations. People will come to know him by degrees.⁵

His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India (7.483).

This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations (5.53).

7. Frank Dvorak, a Czech artist of Prague, painted a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna based on a vision, and sent it to Swami Abhedanandaji, whom he came to know in about 1911. The painting is now very famous. Several others have seen Sri Ramakrishna in their vision, both during his lifetime and afterwards.

8. The great French author, Nobel laureate Romain Rolland, wrote biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1928 entitled *Ramakrishna the Man-Gods and the Universal Gospel of Swami Vivekananda*, in which he has described Sri Ramakrishna as the younger brother of Jesus Christ. Similarly, several other eminent biographers of Sri Ramakrishna such as Max Müller, Christoph

Isherwood and Hans Torwesten have paid homage to him.

9. Hans Torwesten has written a book in German whose English version is *Ramakrishna and Christ—Or the Paradox of the Incarnation*. This is a comparative study and analysis of the Incarnation as embodied in Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna. A Christian by faith, and with practical experience of religious life in India and Europe, the author has been able to compare both these phenomena in an excellent way from different aspects of their life and teachings. A few of his observations are given below:

What makes him [Sri Ramakrishna] so Christ-like that we can speak of an 'unknown Christ in Hinduism', with a slight and yet momentous shift in meaning which the Indian theologian Panikkar gave to the title of his book, not a Christ hidden in Hindu philosophy, but a *Christ who lived a hundred years ago and is still unknown to most Christians* [emphasis added].⁶

We find ourselves in a vastly rich transitional field, in which the incarnation indeed no longer has the meaning it had in traditional Christianity and the paraclete is clearly coming to the fore, but where perhaps this very 'Indian Summer' of the incarnation has nevertheless produced *one of the most beautiful, colourful and also most profoundest of God's revelations* [in Sri Ramakrishna] (p. 211) [emphasis added].

Sarada, just like Mary, was the embodiment of purity and virginity. Once as a young girl she looked up at the moon and cried, 'Oh, even the moon has stains! Grant, O God, that I shall always be without stain!' She was 'chosen' by the Lord, because when they wanted to marry off the young Ramakrishna ... (p. 121).

Married to fulfil a divine purpose, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi lived a pure spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna seated her on a pedestal and worshipped her as the Divine Mother of the Universe. Hence she got the epithet 'Holy Mother'. Anyone who understands the significance of this event will, in the words of Hans Torwesten,

see in it more than just the union of two individ-

uals at a high spiritual level. He will see in it the 'heavenly wedding' of the Son and His Shakti, who no longer stands completely in the background as the handmaiden of the Lord, but sits on the highest throne as the 'spouse', as the embodiment of the World Mother, before whom even the Son Himself humbly bows down. It is the *bodily* ascension of the Virgin to heaven taken literally, not proclaimed as a dogma, but celebrated in Hindu fashion (p. 120).

In this incarnation, Sri Ramakrishna held his mother, wife, and all women in great reverence and love, as embodiments of the Divine Mother, whereas in the earlier incarnation as Jesus Christ

many will find support for their anti-feminine feelings in the example of Jesus. Did he not again and again turn away from his earthly mother, often with harsh words, and turn towards his Heavenly Father? (p. 110).

10. Another significant factor of great importance in the Ramakrishna incarnation (the Christ come a second time) is that, while all other incarnations and prophets were male and came singly by themselves, Sri Ramakrishna came with Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) together as a complete divine manifestation to elevate the whole of humankind in all its aspects—man, woman, and the young; householders and monks; bhaktas, jnanis and karma yogis; the active ones and the meditative ones.

While Jesus Christ established the Fatherhood of God, Sri Ramakrishna, in addition to it and other aspects of God, established specially the Motherhood of God, which is more intimate and loving. It also does justice to womankind by showing that God is not exclusively male, but can equally be female.

11. Sri Ramakrishna practised as spiritual sadhana not only the different aspects of the Vedic religion such as the various forms of bhakti, yoga, tantra and Vedanta, but also the sadhanas of the major world religions such as Christianity and Islam, and established that each religion is a path and will lead to the as-

pect of the Divinity envisaged by it, under whatever name and form God is worshipped with sincerity, purity and devotion. He also realized the absolute non-dual nature (Advaita) of the supreme infinite Reality beyond all names and forms, and established in his life and teachings the harmony of all religions as different manifestations of that supreme Reality. In his Advaita sadhana, he also showed that one has to go beyond all attachment to name and form, including the highly beloved dualistic personal names and forms of God helpful in the early stages of spiritual life, to reach oneness with the absolute Reality. This he did by severing with the 'sword of knowledge' the blissful form of his beloved Divine Mother Kali, whom he had worshipped devoutly earlier as the Divine Mother of the Universe, the supreme Power (Sakti) of the infinite spiritual Reality.

Of course, this harmony of religions has been in the Vedic tradition from very ancient times⁷ and has been emphasized in the whole gamut of Vedic literature all along for over

One cannot achieve spiritual infinitude or freedom from bondage to external beings and entities by merely upholding and praising the divinity and glory of God. That is possible only by realizing the inner divinity. True freedom and bliss are only in the Infinite and not in the finite.

5000 years. Hence there is harmony among the numerous denominations of Hinduism. What Sri Ramakrishna did was to practise the ideas and demonstrate them in his life in this scientific age. Hence he is recognized as the prophet of religious harmony, and the temples dedicated to him are now called 'universal temples'.

12. Swami Vivekananda effectively propagated Ramakrishna's universal message to

... the life and message of the divine trio, Sri Ramakrishna—the Christ come again, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, show that, if there is to be a ‘Kingdom of God on earth’, the followers of all the religions of the world have to recognize the oneness of Religion and, giving up exclusivism and feelings of superiority, need to fraternize and show mutual appreciation and respect for other ways of worship, if not actually participate in them.

humankind in America, Europe and India. His great utterances initiated a gradual and silent change in the world of religious thought. We quote here a few passages from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* containing his thoughts—his lectures, conversations, letters, papers, interviews and compositions.

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.⁶

... if any one here hopes that this [religious] unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the other, to him I say, ‘Brother, yours is an impossible hope.’ Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. ... The Christian is not to become a

Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: ‘Help and not Fight,’ ‘Assimilation and not Destruction,’ ‘Harmony and Peace and not Dissension’ (1.24).

Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian’s church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God’s book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the

future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future! (2.373-4).

We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best (6.416).

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature (1.19).

13. While Swami Vivekananda preached Vedanta and enthused the young to dedicate themselves to building up their spiritual life with the ideal of service to humanity as worship of God, Holy Mother Sarada Devi acted as the spiritual guide of the Ramakrishna Order. Her guidance was considered valuable by all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. She represented the Motherhood of God and became an ideal for women the world over. Her life and teachings were simple but profound, to which Sister Nivedita and other western devotees have paid glowing tributes. Swami Vivekananda wrote to his brother disciples:

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries?—Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. Dear brother, you understand little now, but by degrees you will come to know it all. ... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me (4.484).



Thus the life and message of the divine trio, Sri Ramakrishna—the Christ come again, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, show that, if there is to be a 'Kingdom of God on earth', the followers of all the religions of the world have to recognize the oneness of Religion and, giving up exclusivism and feelings of superiority, need to fraternize and show mutual appreciation and respect for other ways of worship, if not actually participate in them. Thus can be cultivated the ideal of '*vasudhā eva kuṭumbakam*, the whole world is one family'. All hatred and ill will have to stop. Thus alone will all prosper together and attain the highest good. This is practical Advaita, the recognition of the oneness of existence.

The Vedic tradition has tried to put this into practice. Hence there were hardly any religious conflicts in India until the exclusivist Semitic religions came in and gave rise to violent confrontations. There used to be only debates to establish the nature of the supreme Reality, of the cosmic universe, and of living beings and their mutual relationship. A proper application of the spirit of oneness (Advaita) can harmonize all the religions of the world, just as it did in the past in India. It is ego-culture which gives rise to the notions of superiority of one's religion and attempts to impose it on others.

The speciality of the Vedic tradition is

"Many are the names of God
and infinite are the forms
through which He may be
approached. In whatever
name and form you worship
Him, through them you will
realize Him."

—Sri Ramakrishna

that it does not claim any uniqueness, holding as it does that religion is inherent in every individual as potential divinity. One has only to express it in life and action. Because of the God within, there are 'Gods' as His agents outside, as in a mirror. It is only human beings that can achieve sainthood or prophethood because they can manifest their latent divine potential. Animals, however much they may be taught, cannot do that.

One cannot achieve spiritual infinitude or freedom from bondage to external beings and entities by merely upholding and praising the divinity and glory of God. That is possible only by realizing the inner divinity. True freedom and bliss are only in the Infinite and not in the finite. So everyone is exhorted to 'Arise, Awake, and strive to realize the infinite Truth within, taking guidance from the great ones who have already realized It. For the path is difficult—as difficult as walking on the edge

of a razor."⁹

*

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 6, p. 335. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
2. Siva, Vishnu and so on are the names of the supreme Being in His different aspects. Literally, Siva means the good, the auspicious; and Vishnu means the Divinity that pervades everything immanently (*viś*, 'to enter').
3. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 34.
4. *ibid.*, p. 838.
5. CW, 6.320.
6. Hans Torwesten, *Ramakrishna and Christ—Or the Paradox of the Incarnation* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1999), p. 82.
7. In the Vedic tradition, which sees the oneness of religion, there is no antagonism to other religions, nor attempts at proselytization. The good and beneficial aspects of all religions are welcomed and adopted. The *R̥g Veda* says: 'Ā no bhadrāḥ kratavo yantu viśvataḥ, let noble thoughts come to us from every side.'
8. CW, 1.4.
9. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 3.14.

One God Worshipped Variouslly

Various ornaments are made of gold. Although their substance is the same, they are called variously and appear in different forms. So one and the same God is worshipped in different countries and ages under different names and forms. He may be worshipped in various ways according to different conceptions—some may like to regard Him as father and others as mother, some as friend and others as beloved, some again as the innermost treasure of their heart and others as their sweet little child—but it is always one and the same God that is worshipped in all these diverse relations.

—Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 148

Pilgrimage to Europe

SWAMI GOKULANANDA

Anita, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's daughter, lives in Munich. Her husband is a professor and Member of the German Bundestag. The same evening (9 April) Amiya and Lipi Paul took me to their house. It is a beautiful home. Netaji's wife spent her days in that house. Anita still retains some of the beautiful Indian traditions. When I reached their house, she came out and offered *pranam* to me by touching my feet. They

tion and prayer.

On 11 April we visited briefly Wiesbaden, the capital of Hesse. Along with Amiya and Lipi, I visited Bhupen Ray's house. Bhupen had a severe heart problem, but he was happy to see us. His German wife Sushan received us cordially. We also went to Asit Chakravarty's house. I did *arati*, and gave a brief talk to the assembled devotees there.

On 12 April, I went to Frankfurt along with Amiya and Lipi and visited Goethe House-cum- Museum. It was a nice experience to ride briefly on the metro rail. We visited Nandita and her German husband, Aruna—nice couple— with whom we had lunch.

Bindweide, Wiesbaden

13 and 14 April were spent at the Bindweide Vedanta Society, near Wiesbaden. I have already spoken about the Bindweide Vedanta Society, which is not far from Bonn, capital of the erstwhile West Germany. Lily Chakravarty is its treasurer. Along with Amiya and Lipi Paul I arrived there at 9:20 am on 13 April. I was to stay at the Society for two days to attend a seminar on Vedanta. I found it to be an active centre dedicated to the cause of Vedanta. It has a beautiful shrine. Though the Society still does not have the status of an affiliated centre of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Veetamohanandaji, our monastic brother from Gretz, France, presides over it, visits there occasionally and gives talks.

I was thrilled to learn that the devotees of this centre sing songs like '*Bhava-bhayanjanjana*', '*Bhava-sagara-tarana*', '*Bhuvana-rupam-ati*', '*Gurur-brahma*', '*Hari om rama-*



Anita, Netaji's daughter and her husband

showed me Netaji's book, *Indian Struggle*, the first copy of which Netaji presented to his wife with his signature inscribed on it. It was a memorable visit, reminding me of many things of the past and of our great heritage. It also reminded me of the deep devotion Netaji had for Swami Vivekananda and how Swamiji had a deep influence on many of the great patriots who fought for India's freedom. I was very deeply touched by the affection and hospitality of the great Netaji's daughter and her erudite and gentle professor husband. We left Munich for Frankfurt at 8 pm.

10 April was spent in local visits to a church and a museum. We had quiet medita-

krishna' and '*Hari narayana govinda*'. Lily Chakravarty, the highly devoted treasurer of the Society, is a German lady married to a Bengali. At her request I performed puja at the shrine. The puja was more an act of devotion since the exact ritual could not be performed in all detail in the absence of essential articles for puja. However, this itself was a great experience in Germany. I have already spoken about Swami Yatiswaranandaji's visit to nearby Wiesbaden in 1933-4. The Bindweide Vedanta Society being near, I started thinking about the absence of a centre in Germany.

14 April was the Bengali New Year Day.

Early in the morning, I mentally visited Kamarpukur, Jayrambati and other sacred places. The day was spent in prayer, meditation and a talk on 'Guidelines for Inner Life.' We returned to Idestein at 6:20 pm.

Berlin

I went to Berlin, which is so deeply etched in the history of 20th century Europe. I saw the Berlin Wall, which symbolized the human being at his worst, seeking separation, segregation and domination. It was also the harbinger of the cold war era that ruled the world for nearly half a century and brought it to the brink of a third World War.

Berlin surely evokes powerful emotions especially for those who were young and lived through those times in the first half of the 20th century. There is so much of history associated with the city. I saw the stadium where the 1936 Olympic Games were held. Adolf Hitler was present for many of the events. He would be very sorry whenever a non-Aryan or black won accolades at the Games because that

would disprove his pet theories on the racial superiority of the German race. At the 1936 Olympics, Jesse Owens, the great African athlete, won four gold medals, perhaps disappointing Hitler in the process. Subsequently, the road on which the stadium is located was named after Jesse Owens!

I saw the famous Cecilienhof Palace where the Potsdam Conference was held between 17 July 1945 and 2 August 1945, attended by Truman, Churchill and Stalin.

16 April was spent in meditation, singing of bhajans and prayer. I spoke on 'How to Overcome Mental Tension'.

One good tradition there is the chanting of the powerful *Bhagavadgita* verse (4.24) in French just before the commencement of the meal. They also repeat in the mornings and evenings a profound statement of Holy Mother Sarada Devi: 'If you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own defects. Nobody is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own.'

My German visit was drawing to a close. As originally planned, I had to drive to Paris from Frankfurt in Amiya's car. Unfortunately, the car developed some trouble and so Amiya, Lipi and Debashis Bagchi arranged for an air ticket for me from Frankfurt to Paris for 18 April. We returned to Lipi's Institute in Idestein on 17 April in the evening.

Gretz, France

18 April: I did my meditation and *japa* in the shrine very early in the morning. I was to leave for Paris today. Before leaving I spent some moments in Lipi's Stress Management Institute. We finally left Idestein at 11 am for the Frankfurt Airport. It was an intense, hectic and memorable twelve days spent with sincere devotees in Germany. Lipi, Amiya and all our other friends had become deeply involved in our brief association, prayer, meditation and general discussions. As the time of departure drew near, everyone bade me farewell, Lipi a bit emotionally. They are all very good people doing wonderful work in a foreign land. I mused again

on the importance of having a centre of the Ramakrishna Order in Germany.

We touched down at Paris at 2:05 pm. Swami Devatmananda of Gretz centre met me at the airport. It was a pleasant coincidence to meet at the airport Swami Gautamanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai and a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math. He was on his way to Chicago.

I reached Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, our centre in Gretz, about 30 km from Paris, at 3:45 pm. Swami Veetamohanandaji gave me a warm reception. I was accommodated in the same room where I stayed in 1992 when I visited the centre last. This room was used as a shrine during Swami Siddheswaranandaji's time.

The Centre reminds me of many important things in my own life. I have already mentioned Swami Siddheswaranandaji. A very talented monk, he authored many valuable books, some of them being *Meditation According to Yoga-Vedanta* and *Hindu Thought and Carmelite Mysticism*. It was Swami Siddheswaranandaji who built and established this centre in Gretz. The pioneering work done by great monks like him and Swami Yatiswaranandaji is very significant.

Gretz centre has many interesting traditions. Of course, many of them trace their origin to Swami Siddheswaranandaji's genius. The French, as we all know, are very deeply attached to their language. And this is perhaps an emotional factor with them. Their cultural and literary history is deeply embedded in their language. Possibly, it is primarily this national sentiment for their mother tongue that prompted Swami

Siddheswaranandaji to learn French to give discourses in that language.

One good tradition there is the chanting of the powerful *Bhagavadgita* verse (4.24) in French just before the commencement of the meal. This tradition was introduced by Swami Siddheswaranandaji. They also repeat in the mornings and evenings a profound statement of Holy Mother Sarada Devi: 'If you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own defects. Nobody is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own.' These are only some of the illustrative examples unique to the practices adopted at the Gretz centre.

19 April was spent mainly with devotees. Elizabeth-Arun Maria and her parents came from England. Sarada is an exceptionally devoted and pious soul, closely associated with the Gretz centre. She is practically the daughter of the ashram. Swami Veetamohanandaji and I had lunch at Tara's house, with Tara and Sarada as hosts.

Some part of the day was spent in visiting the famous Eiffel Tower which stands tall and magnificent, 318 metres high. It is perhaps the most significant landmark of Paris. This masterpiece of technology and engineering was inaugurated on 31 March 1889. It was the key-stone of the Universal Exposition, meant to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution. It is difficult to imagine what went through the mind of Swamiji, a



Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz

deep student of history, when he saw this monument during his visit to Paris in 1900. We also visited a famous cathedral.

It being an Ekadashi day, we spent the evening in *arati* and *ramnam sankirtan*.

Amsterdam

Sarada and John saw me off at the railway station and I caught a train to Amsterdam and reached there at 10:30 am. It was a wonderful train journey through the picturesque countryside. The trains are so beautifully furnished.

Swami Sarvatmananda, head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Vereniging, our Amsterdam centre, came to the railway station, which is attached to the Schiphol airport. I was impressed with the cleanliness and beauty of the airport. Swami Sarvatmananda was attired in western dress and when I queried him about that, he said that monks wore ochre robes only inside the monastery.

There are many important links between Netherlands and the Ramakrishna Order. One, it was from that country that Swami Atulananda, an illustrious monk of our Order, hailed. He was Dutch by birth, born in Amsterdam. His book *With the Swamis in America and India* is eminently readable. Conversations with him are recorded in another book titled *Atman Alone Abides*. He went to America in search of a job and came in contact with Swami Abhedananda. He later came to India, and received spiritual initiation from Holy Mother Sarada Devi. He spent the last part of his exemplary life in Barlowgunj near Mussoorie, and at Kankhal. I had the good fortune of coming in personal contact with him.

Swami Vivekananda came to the Netherlands in 1900 and stayed for three days at the Victoria Hotel in Amsterdam. I had the privilege of seeing it during my last visit there in 1992. Vedanta work started there during Swamiji's visit 1900. The work was sustained by many other great monks of the Order. Swami Yatiswaranandaji visited Amsterdam periodically when he was in Germany in 1933-4 and

delivered lectures on Vedanta. Swami Ranganathanandaji visited the country regularly between 1971 and 1986 and spoke on Vedanta.

The Amsterdam centre was officially affiliated to the Ramakrishna Order in 1990 and Swami Chidbhasananda became its first head.

Now, back to 20 April 2001. Dave is a Dutch devotee of the ashram. He is a bachelor and very deeply devoted to the Order. Sujata, an Argentine devotee, was married to a Dutch. Her husband is no more. The couple were initiated by Swami Ritajananda. Sujata's house functioned as the ashram before it moved to the present building. So her house is still considered sacred and important. In the afternoon we went on a visit to the countryside which was very peaceful. We went round the Amsterdam city also. In the evening we came to the old ashram, Sujata's house. There we saw a video on Gretz centre and I was thrilled to see Swami Siddheswaranandaji's pictures and hear his voice too.

We returned to the ashram before evening *arati*.

Gretz Again

I returned to Gretz on 21 April 2001. I caught a train which reached Paris at 1:40 pm. Sarada and Tara met me at the railway station. Dilip, Malavika and Devleen came from England to be with us for two days.

In 1992, I came across Mira, a deeply devoted and blessed soul and a disciple of Swami Siddheswaranandaji. She is now 82. She knew of my special relationship with her guru, and was very kind to spare two days for me, and showed me many photos of his and letters written by him. Mira's devotion to her guru is profound. She said: 'Maharaj, *guru-kripa hi kevalam*.' She continued, 'Maharaj, *guruseva* is my meditation. I am in his world and feel that he is with me.' In fact, Swami Siddheswaranandaji himself derived enormous support and love from an old French couple, M and Mme Sutho, who were greatly attracted by his sterling character and purity, and looked upon him as their own son. It was

they who donated the land and money for the Gretz centre. The centre now publishes a Vedantic journal covering a variety of subjects. Swami Veetamohanandaji has been serializing in it his translation of my book *Some Guidelines to Inner Life*.

I am yet to find an individual who is not deeply touched, enchanted and turned inward by that great chanting '*Hari om rama-krishna*'. Well, this is a contribution of the Gretz ashram with the tune and music set by Swami Siddheswaranandaji. It creates a spiritual vibration after the daily ritual of worship and meditation. There is regular prayer every day from 6:30 to 7:30 am, despite the intense cold in winter.

On 22 April I gave a talk on 'How to Overcome Mental Tension', which was well-attended and appreciated. Many among the audience were from Paris. I went for a drive in the countryside and had some coffee at McDonald's.

24 April was a rather busy day and in a way momentous for me. In the forenoon I went with Swami Veetamohanandaji and Kishore to India House in Paris to attend a press conference meant to serve as a curtain-raiser for the ensuing seminar in Paris on 'Science and Spirituality' slated for May 2001. Along with Bikas Sanyal, Director of India House and Advisor to UNESCO, I went to Sorbonne University in the afternoon and thereafter to places where Swami Vivekananda stayed in Paris during his three-month stay between August and October 1900.

When Swami Vivekananda came to Paris in 1900 he stayed at two different houses. First he stayed with Jules Boyes at 39 Rue Gajam and learnt French from him. Not everyone welcomes us, and so at this place I had to be content with making *pranam* from outside.

The other place where Swamiji stayed and spent most of his time while in France was the house of Mr and Mrs Leggett. I could visit this house with the help of the concerned people. From this place Swamiji wrote several letters. In a letter written to Swami Turiyanan-

daji on 1 September 1900, Swamiji says (CW, 8.533-4):

For some time ... I shall stay with the French to pick up their language. I am somewhat freed from worries. ... I have no longer any desire to kill myself by touring. I feel like settling down somewhere spending my time with books. I have somewhat mastered the French language; but if I stay among the French for a month or two I shall be able to carry on conversation well. If one can master this language and German sufficiently, one can virtually become well acquainted with European learning. The people of France are mere intellectualists. They run after worldly things and firmly believe God and Soul to be superstitions; they are extremely loath to talk on such subjects. This is a truly materialistic country. Let me see what that Lord does. But this country is at the head of Western culture and Paris is the capital of that culture. ...

There is a beautiful public park round the house. The gentlemen cannot speak English.... I shall have to speak French perforce. It is all Mother's will.

I also visited the public park in front of that house.

Next I went to the National Museum of Modern Art and saw many great paintings, including the much-talked-about *Mona Lisa*, with that famous enigmatic smile, perhaps wondering at the lifestyle of the French. Painted by that great creative genius Leonardo da Vinci, who possessed such extraordinary talent in fields as diverse as science and arts, *Mona Lisa* has remained a work of lasting greatness.

In the afternoon I visited the room at our Gretz centre where Swami Vidyatmanandaji stayed. I was pleasantly surprised when Swami Veetamohanandaji presented me with a CD containing a record of my last Sunday's talk '*Comment résoudre les tensions de mental*'.

I felt that centres like Gretz and Amsterdam are very important in that they are in non-English-speaking states.

I went to Joauvre Benedictine Convent along with Swami Veetamohanandaji the next day. Sister Souermariebaren received us over

a cup of tea. For an hour and a half we went round and talked. I was impressed by the Convent.

Back to India

My tour to Kuwait and some parts of Europe came to a close. The day for returning to India, 27 April 2001, had arrived. The tour was extremely educative. I saw how the cause of Vedanta in the Occident, of which the first seeds were sown by the Swami Vivekananda more than a century ago, had grown and is being nourished and sustained. No doubt a lot of ground still needs to be covered and the Occident is yet to fully awaken to that realiza-

tion. But the Lord's cause is being served by devoted and dedicated children of Sri Ramakrishna. May they all be protected by Mother Durga and our Holy Trinity!

I finally bade goodbye to Swami Veetamohanandaji, Sarada and all others who were very kind to me during those past few days, and left for the airport along with Swami Devatmananda. The flight was on time. It touched down in Delhi at about 4:15 am on 28 April, slightly ahead of schedule. Many devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were present at the airport to extend to me a warm and affectionate welcome.

✱

Xvxry Pxrson is Important

Xvxn though my typxwritxr is an old modxl, it works wxll, xxcxpt for onx kxy. You would think that with all thx othxr kxys functioning propxrlly, onx kxy not working propxrlly would hardly bx noticxd; but just onx kxy out of whack sxxms to ruin thx wholx xffort.

You may say to yoursxlf, 'Wxll, I'm only onx pxrson. No onx will noticx if I don't do my bxst.' But it doxs makx a diffxrxncx bxcausx to bx xffxctivx, an organization nxxds activx participation by vxryonx to thx bxst of his or hxr ability.

So thx nxxt timx you think you arx not important, rxmxmbxr my old typxwritxr. You arx a kxy pxrson.



Silence

Four monks decided to go into silence for a month. They started out well enough but after the first day one monk said, 'I wonder if I locked the door of my cell in the monastery before we set out.'

Another monk said, 'You fool! We decided to keep silence for a month and now you have gone and broken it!'

A third monk said, 'What about you? You have broken it too!'

Said the fourth, 'Thank God I'm the only one who hasn't spoken yet!'

—*The Prayer of the Frog*, p. 152

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The Divine Mother is present in all forms. But why do we wish to see Her in Her blissful, benevolent posture only?

Yes, we superimpose our feelings on the form. In the *Durgāsaptaśati*, there are two verses (1.80-1):

*Khaḍgini śūlini ghorā
gadini cakriṇi tathā;
Śaṅkhiṇi cāpini bāṇa-
bhuśuṇḍi parighāyudhā.*

*Saumyā-saumya-tarāśeṣa
saumyebhyastvati-sundarī
Parāparāṇām paramā
tameva parameśvari.*

In one there is mention of the terrible form of the Mother, while in the other, it is the gentle form. This is the speciality of the Divine Mother.

All are afraid of the tiger. But the cub is not afraid of its mother. He who does not have fear, is not afraid of any form of the Mother. We see different forms of the Divine Mother according to our feelings and temperaments. The tigress tenderly cares for her cub and the cub looks upon her as a loving mother. But for others, she is a terrible beast. When I was at Kankurgachi, some kittens lived under my cot for a few days. When they saw me, they would hide. But if their mother came and called, they would instantly come out. The mother-cat would just make a gurgling sound, and the little ones would run to her. Someone showed me lions on television. The lioness is seen playing with her children; she caresses them, cajoles them, feeds them and teases them. The cubs are not afraid of their mother, but the rest of the world is. So it's like that.

Which form of Holy Mother should we meditate on?

Whatever we feel drawn to, the word 'Mother' brings love and solace to our mind. The loving mother, the all-suffering mother, the all-forgiving mother is Holy Mother. We must meditate on her thus.

During his terminal illness, Turiyanandaji said that he suffered because he did not do Sri Ramakrishna's work. But he did such a lot of tapasyā and sadhana all his life. Were they not Sri Ramakrishna's work? What did he mean by his statement?

By 'Sri Ramakrishna's work' he meant Swamiji's work; that is to say, the work which Swami Vivekananda had initiated. Turiyanandaji did not do all that Swamiji wanted him to. He was contemplative by nature and did not have the urge to work. He went to the United States at Swamiji's command and stayed at the Shanti Ashrama there for some time. There too he led a life of intense austerities. Swami Vivekananda's ideal is: do *this* as well as *that*. You must not confine yourself to *japa* and meditation. At the same time, you must not restrict yourself only to work. As an ideal, both need to be harmonized.

Are you impressed by any particular teaching of Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivanandaji)?

There are many teachings and we must understand them with reference to the context. I remember an incident. One day, while walking on the Math courtyard in an indrawn mood, he suddenly stood still. Just then a monk came and saluted him by touching his feet. Unfortunately, at that very moment Mahapurush Maharaj also started walking. So he tripped and fell, hurting his hand. He scolded the monk. I was with Mahapurush Maharaj then, along with his attendant. Later,

when he returned to his room, he said: 'Ah! I scolded that monk. But how will he know what was my state then? My eyes were open, but I did not see anything.' Hearing his words, I was stunned. Is there a state when the eyes are open but you don't see anything? I was greatly impressed by that statement.

Please tell us something about Swami Trigunatitanandaji Maharaj.

Regarding Trigunatitanandaji, you have read in the books. I too came to know about him from books. What new thing can I say about him? I have heard that he could eat a lot if he so desired. But at the same time he could also fast for days at a stretch. One day, Trigunatitanandaji was going somewhere on foot. On the way, he felt hungry. He went to a hotel. He told the owner of the hotel that he ate a little more than others, and wanted to know how much it would cost him. The hotelier said courteously: 'Eat however much you like, Swamiji; you don't have to pay extra.' Now, Trigunatitanandaji began to gulp down instantly whatever was given to him. The hotelier was surprised! At last, he said, 'Eat however much you want, whatever you want. You don't have to pay anything at all. I shall think I have done some *sādhu-sevā*.'

When Trigunatitanandaji was at Udbodhan House, he would eat in the morning but didn't at night. He would spend his nights without meals, by managing with two-pice worth puffed rice. This continued for days at a stretch. Swami Premanandaji knew about this. One morning, Trigunatitanandaji went to Belur Math. That day, *haluā* had been prepared. Both Premanandaji and Trigunatitanandaji began conversing, and Premanandaji went on serving more and more *haluā* to Trigunatitanandaji. Gradually, the entire vessel containing the sweet became empty!

Is someone who has no faith in himself an atheist?

Swami Vivekananda says that. Generally, not many have faith in themselves. How many do you find with faith in themselves? Technically, one who does not believe in the Vedas is an atheist and one who believes in the Vedas is a believer.

How to have faith in oneself?

We should follow this stream of thought: 'I can achieve everything; I can do it,' etc. We should not give up just because we have failed a few times.

Because of numerous obstacles, the mind becomes restless. What shall I do?

Everything belongs to Him. Your house, wealth, family, job, relatives and friends, everything belongs to Him alone. Think thus deeply. Your mind will then remain unperturbed under all circumstances.

Will my mental power increase by performing japa?

By performing *japa*, gradually your dependence on God will grow. That will bring courage and confidence.

Does the guru himself fix our iṣṭa or chosen Deity? Is it he who gives us strength?

In a way, yes. You see, the real guru is not outside you. He is always inside, giving you strength. To believe or not is up to you, but it is the inner guru who provides you with strength. While you meditate, do you think of your guru as sitting in a playground? No, you don't. You think he is within. Because the field is not ready, we don't understand it even when the guru gives us strength.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. 'Be and make.' Let this be our motto. Say not man is a sinner. Tell him that he is a God. Even if there were a devil, it would be our duty to remember God always, and not the devil.

—CW, 4.351

Religious Harmony, the Need of the Hour

DR S RADHAKRISHNAN

The constructive ideas on which civilization is built are conventionally traced to this or that country, Greece or Rome, China or India. There is an old Talmudic saying. The Rabbis ask, why was the Law given in the wilderness, and the answer is given: In order that no one country could claim propriety rights over it. This is true of all ideas. They are by nature universal. They may arise in individuals and may develop their power through communities. But we cannot speak of them as belonging to this person or that community. This would be to violate their character as ideas. Ideas are not dead things. They have hands and feet. They are alive and challenging. They are charged with power. Their action is unpredictable. We examine here the salient features of major world religions.

Hinduism

The problem of religion arises from the realization of the imperfect condition of man. Life is not merely a physical phenomenon or a biological process. Who shall save me from the body of this death, from the snares and dangers of this world? The need for redemption implies the presence of conditions and circumstances from which we seek escape or liberation.

The fundamental concepts of Indian religious life may be briefly indicated. The goal of life is communion with the Supreme. It is a life of realization, a gnosis, an inner intuitive vision of God, which achieves absolute freedom and escapes from the blind servitude to ordinary experience.

There is a distinction between intellectual recognition and spiritual realization. We can free ourselves from the shackles of the body and in a split second we can see the truth and be overcome by it. We see God so intensely

that the soul is more certain and more possessed by the sight of God than the bodily eye by the light of day.

Intuition is not emotion but the claim to certain knowledge. It gives us a sense of divine reality as a thing immediately certain and directly known. The sense of God penetrates the seer's consciousness, but it does not come like the light of day, something external, something out there in space. The barrier that separates the seer from the divine life is broken down. It is the aim of the seer to live in the light and inspiration of this experience, to be one with God in an abiding union.

The records of these experiences of the Vedas are 'ever the same yet changing ever'. The Vedas, which constitute the essential foundation of the entire spiritual tradition of India, are based on integral experience. The term Veda, derived from the root *vid*, refers to a doctrine based not on faith or revelation but on a higher knowledge attained through a process of intuition or seeing. The Vedas are seen by the rishis, the seers of the earliest times. The Vedas do not give us theories or theologies. The hymns contain reflection of a consciousness that is in communion with metaphysical reality. The gods themselves are not mere images but projections of the experience of significance, of forces directly perceived in man, in nature or beyond. The Vedas are neither infallible nor all-inclusive. Spiritual truth is a far greater thing than the scriptures. We recognize the truth and value of much that has been proclaimed by non-Vedic prophets and we are led equally to perceive the insight of many religious teachers in later centuries. The Vedas are a record of inspired wisdom and deep inner experience.

The second factor is the emphasis on the divine possibilities of man. The Supreme is in

the soul of man.

Godhead can be described and approached in various ways. The Hindu thinkers were conscious of the immensity, the infinity, the inexhaustibility and the mysteriousness of the supreme Spirit. Brahman is a reality which transcends space and time and so is greater than what human understanding can grasp. Brahman is silence. Yet Brahman is the continuing power which pervades and upholds the world. He is the real of the real, the foundation on which the world rests. He is essential freedom. His different functions of creation, preservation and perfection are personalized in the forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The individual deities are affiliated to one or the other. When approaching the different conceptions and representations of the Supreme, the Hindu has a sense of humility, a deep awareness of human frailty.

Religion reflects both God and man. As religion is a life to be lived, not a theory to be accepted or a belief to be adhered to, it allows scope and validity to varied approaches to the Divine. There may be different revelations of the Divine but they are all forms of the Supreme. The Upanishads are clear that the flame is the same even though the types of fuel used may vary.

In the Upanishads we find a fourfold status of the supreme Reality. While the world is the form of the divine, the cause is threefold.

The problem facing man is the conflict between the divine and the non-divine in him. The *Yoga Sutra Bhashya* says that the stream of mind flows in two directions, the one leading to virtue, the other to vice. To overcome the conflict and integrate the personality is the aim of religion. The problem has no meaning for beasts and gods as Aristotle says. It concerns the human predicament.

There are different recognized pathways by which the duality is overcome and perfection reached. In order to see in the world of spiritual reality, we must close our eyes to the world of nature. The *Katha Upanishad* says that man is turned outward by his senses and

so loses contact with his own deepest self. His soul has become immersed in outer things, in power and possessions. It must turn round to find its right direction and find the meanings and realities it has missed. To hear the melodies of spirit, we must shut off the noise of the world. It means to open the inner eye to spiritual realities, capture the sounds that come from the world of spirit, sing in silence the hymn of praise to the supreme Being.

True religious life must express itself in love and aim at the unity of mankind. 'Beads, necklaces, rosaries, triple paint on forehead, or putting on ashes, pilgrimages, baths in holy rivers, meditation, or image worship do not purify a man as service of fellow-creatures does.' The Hindu dreamed of universal peace. The goal of world unity is to be achieved by ahimsa, which is insisted on by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Even Manu intended the message of India to be of universal application: 'All the people of the world would learn from the leaders of this country the lessons for their behaviour.'

There is a persistent misunderstanding that we look upon the world as an illusion and this view is attributed to Sankara. The *Brahma Sutra* clearly makes out that the world is not non-existent, that it is not a mental aberration. Of course Sankara makes out that the world is a progressive manifestation of the Supreme.

Though there was no missionary motive, no attempt to convert others to the Hindu faith, its influence extended to other regions like Java, Bali, where we still have a Hindu colony, and other parts of the East. Greek leaders like Heliodorus became devotees of the Hindu faith. While missionary religions carry out propaganda and are interested in the increase of the number of their followers, Hindu religion was not what we call a proselytizing religion, though in its great days it had no objection to foreigners accepting the Hindu faith.

Buddhism

Buddhism which arose in India was an attempt to achieve a purer Hinduism. It may

be called a reform within Hinduism. The formative years of Buddhism were spent in the Hindu religious environment. It shares in a large measure the basic presuppositions of Hinduism. It is a product of the Hindu religious ethos. But soon it established itself as a distinctive religious tradition. It split early into two branches, though the nature of its thought and teaching is common to its different expressions. The Hinayana is the southern, Pali or Theravada Buddhism; the Mahayana is the northern, mainly Sanskrit Buddhism. Both groups claim that they are loyal to the teachings of the Buddha. The former is more monastic than the latter. Mahayana has been more sensitive to the religious yearnings of the people. While Hinayana places its emphasis on individual attainment of salvation, Mahayana emphasizes the grace of the Divine. It is sometimes contended that the Mahayana Buddhism reveals a stage of truth greater than that which the Buddha gave to his followers in the Pali scriptures as they were not spiritually mature to receive the higher stage of truth.

From his experience of enlightenment the Buddha derived his doctrines. The four-fold truth—the nature of man and the character of the world, the cause of this predicament, the way by which man may rise above it and the state of enlightenment or release from subjection to time—is the result of his own experience of truth. The Buddha shared with men those aspects of his experiences which can be expressed in words. The state of enlightenment is beyond definition or description. The Buddha refused to speculate on the nature of transcendent reality. Each of us has to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha who blazed the path. Each individual has to attain the experience by his own individual effort. Only when the individual himself experiences enlightenment, he is said to know the truth or be enlightened. He is then freed from the shackles of earthbound existence and becomes divine. The scriptures, the Pali Tripitakas, are the sources for the knowledge of truth, since they record the Buddha's teachings. The seekers of

the past and the masters of the present attained salvation by devotion to the path revealed by the Buddha and placing their trust in him.

The Hinayana holds that the experience of enlightenment which was realized by the Buddha is attainable by other human individuals if they follow the path in his footsteps. Every individual has in him the possibility of becoming an arhat, who is superior to time and has conquered the world. The Mahayana adopts the ideal of the bodhisattva who, though he has attained release, out of concern and love for mankind lives in the world where he may serve men by bestowing hope and guiding their steps. It preaches universal salvation. In Hinayana the founder of Buddhism is worshipped as the Divine. The other deities worshipped by men pay homage to the Buddha. He is said to be the instructor not only of men but of gods. He is to be adored as the saviour of men through the truth he exemplified in his life. In the Mahayana, the earthly Buddha is the eternal Buddha who reveals himself in all worlds. Gautama Sakyamuni is an earthly incarnation of the eternal Buddha who exists in countless worlds. All things are subject to him. All existences are the results of his creation. The nature of Godhead which has developed in the Mahayana is analogous to the Hindu conception. According to the doctrine of the *trikaya*, the *dharmakaya* or the body of dharma is the ultimate first principle, the Divine from which all things proceed and to which they all return. It is the ultimate Godhead completely transcendent to the world. The next category of the Divine is the *sambhogakaya*, the body of bliss or enlightenment. This answers to the personal God, who is the creator and preserver of the universe. He is the deity worshipped by man. *Nirmanakaya* is the manifestation of the Divine on earth. It is the Divine incarnate in human life and history for the purpose of making the Divine known to man. Mahayana Buddhism has scope for the gracious saving power of the Divine. It is not merely by human effort but by divine grace

that man attains salvation.

The Buddha recognizes diverse ways to reach the truth. But when the truth is attained, the way falls away. One need not insist that it is the only way to reach the truth. The Buddha gives us the parable of the raft. Any person who wishes to cross a dangerous river having built a raft for this purpose would indeed be a fool if, when he had crossed, he were to put the raft on his shoulders and take it with him on his journey. In China when the followers of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism met and exalted their own religions, they concluded with the chorus: 'Religions are many, reason is one; we are all brothers.'

According to the Buddha's fourfold truth, the nature of human existence is said to be of a fugitive and fragile character. This did not mean for the Buddha a world-negating creed with no concern for temporal affairs. The Buddha is not only the discoverer of truth but also its revealer to mankind. He shares with men the truth which he has attained. He shows men the way by which truth may be found. The middle path of religious realization is not only the end of religion but also the means by which truth is attained. The means of attaining the goal participates in the nature of the goal itself. The ethical means and the spiritual end cannot be separated. The end of enlightenment enters into the means. It is impossible for a people who despise the world to produce the art and culture which enriches our world. Buddhism does not cause men to turn from the pursuits and endeavours of human life.

Buddhism purports to be a universal religion applicable to all mankind. In the Mahayana not only one's personal salvation but that of all creatures is stressed. Through their infinite love for struggling humanity, the bodhisattvas elect to postpone the final bliss of nirvana to which they are entitled, so that they may continue the unending labour of saving the souls of all since all are destined for Buddhahood.

The Buddha entrusted to his followers

the propagation of his doctrine. Under the patronage of Asoka—who became a convert to Buddhism, repenting bitterly the carnage involved in the conquest of Kalinga—Buddhism became widespread in India. Asoka sent missionaries abroad to spread the Buddhist gospel. Tradition has it that his own son carried the doctrine to Ceylon. It has spread to many other lands from Afghanistan to Japan. It is a supraregional religion. In the process of its expansion Buddhism absorbed into itself the traditions and cultures of the different areas which have accepted its message. While accepting the beliefs and practices of the native peoples, it has helped to refine them.

Jainism

According to Jainism, a *tirthankara* is one who provides the ship to cross the world of samsara. The ship is the dharma. The *tirthankara* is the arhat, the object of worship. Such a person revitalizes the dharma of the world. By destroying the four karmas, he attains the four eminent qualities of infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite power and infinite bliss. Endowed with these qualities he becomes an omniscient being who spends the rest of his life in the world for the good of mankind. When the self realizes its true nature it is freed from subjection to time or as it is said, it is released from rebirth. He becomes the perfect being. The siddha is worshipped because he represents the final spiritual perfection. The arhat, the siddha, the sangha and the dharma are the four objects of supreme value worthy of adoration. Jainism emphasizes the potential divine stature of man and its teaching claims to be of universal application.

Zoroastrianism

In Zoroastrianism there is a dualism, an open struggle between two forces. Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu are the two warring principles and in their struggle is grounded the drama of cosmic life and human history. The one is the principle of light, justice

and the good; the other is the principle of darkness, injustice and evil. The battle between these two is decided by the victory of the good. Man in the world is confronted by the choice between the two principles. Since the conflict between the two principles is universal as to space and time, the choice which man must make is not differentiated and delimited by empirical boundary stones. As a matter of course, those who are called to be followers of Ahura Mazda form among themselves bonds of spiritual solidarity, having nothing to do with empirical relations between them, relations derived from considerations of race, political allegiance and racial groups. The doctrine is a universalist one. The *Avesta* says: 'The souls of the faithful of both sexes in the Aryan countries, the Turanian countries, the Sarnatian countries, the Syrian countries, the Dacian countries, in all countries—all these do we venerate.'

Here we have an explicit definition of a universal religious community which supersedes all distinctions of race, caste and nationality. A believer, wheresoever he be found, is an object of veneration. In the Zoroastrian sense, a believer is one who, irrespective of his political allegiance and earthly origin, becomes a follower of Ahura Mazda in the pursuit of justice and peace. Zarathustra teaches: 'And we worship the former religions of the world devoted to righteousness.'

Judaism

The Jewish Bible does not begin with Jews. It starts with the story of Adam which in Hebrew means 'man'. *Genesis* says: 'This is the book of the generations of man.' It does not speak of the Levite, the priest, or the Jew, but of men. The children of earth are viewed as one family. They have one ancestor who is the father of all. Distinctions of caste and class-differentiation by blood or descent do not supersede the primary fact of human equality. Why was man created one? ask the rabbis and answer: In order that no man should say to another, 'My father was greater than thine.'

Though the Jews are said to stress ceremonial piety, there is also stress on a different attitude to life. Man is made in the image of God. In this ultimate nature man partakes of the divine essence. The *Proverbs* describe the spirit of man as the candle of the Lord, a candle which has to be lit with a divine flame.

Though man is made in the 'image of God', 'the fall of man' represents the lapse from the state of close relationship with God. Now, man possesses the image of God only potentially and not actually. To conform to the will of the Supreme, personal sanctification is essential. The flame of spirit must be kindled in each human soul. 'Thus saith the Lord God: I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them an heart of flesh.' 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'

For creating a new man and a new world, a 'turning of the soul' is essential. The soul of man is seen as 'the lamp of God, searching out all the recesses of the inward parts.' God said to Moses, according to *Exodus*: 'Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live.' When the Covenant of God is written in the heart of man, the transcendent will become completely immanent. 'I have said, ye are gods and all of you are children of the Most High' (*Psalms*).

The Jews do not admit into their temple any image or representation made by hands, no visible likeness of him who is invisible Spirit. They stress the transcendence of God.

The great Commandment of the Jews is to 'love thy neighbour as thyself.' In *Leviticus*, where we find a commentary on this principle, it is said: 'Let there be no hate in your heart for your brother; but you may make a protest to your neighbour so that he may be stopped from doing evil. Do not make attempts to get equal with one who has done you wrong, or keep hard feelings against the children of your people, but have love for your neighbour as for yourself. I am the Lord.'

This principle applies not only to one's

brothers or kinsmen or neighbours but to all. 'And if a man from another country is living in your land with you, do not make life hard for him; let him be to you as one of your countrymen and have love for him as for yourself; for you were living in a strange land, in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.' Micah says: 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.' Moses uttered the prayer: 'Would that all God's people were prophets.' Isaiah says: 'He shall judge between the nations and they shall beat their swords to ploughshares. ... Neither shall they learn war anymore.' The weapons of war should be turned to the service of peace. The nations form one family and they are inter-responsible.

Christianity

Christianity is the religion based on the life and experience of Jesus. The Cross becomes significant only when we make it our own, when we undergo crucifixion. Jesus bids us to walk the path he trod, that we may share the union with God, which he attained. 'Seek and ye shall find.' Each one must seek for himself if he is to find. The truth latent in every soul must become manifest in the awakened spiritual consciousness. It is Jesus 'risen in the hearts of men'. Then shall we be able to 'work in the newness of life'. All things are then made new. Those who raise themselves above their unregenerate condition are the god-men who are the manifestations of the new creation, the promise and pledge of the destiny in store for humanity. There is no one way by which spiritual rebornness is attained. 'Marvel not that I have said unto thee, ye must be born again. ... The wind bloweth where it

listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' In the same spirit it is said: 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.'

St Paul says: 'Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you.' 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?' 'Ye are the temple of the living God.' For

Origen, there is a blood relationship between God and man. Though God is the source of our being, everlasting, transcendent, He is also close to our hearts, the universal Father in whom we live, move and have our being. 'Be ye therefore perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Love of God is the easiest way to reach salvation. John says: 'If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar.'

The Cross means physical suffering, earthly defeat but spiritual victory. Through suffering lies the way to liberation. Pascal says that Jesus struggles with death until the end of the

If the world is to be united on a religious basis, it will be not on the basis of this or that religion but by a cooperation among the different religions of the world. If the different religions strive to achieve their common ideals and seek to understand the differences in a sympathetic spirit, the world will be relieved of the misery and fear which now engulf it.

world. In this boundless Gethsemane which is the life of the universe, we have to struggle on unto death wherever a tear falls, wherever a heart is seized with despair, wherever an injustice or an act of violence is committed. 'Hast thou seen thy brother? Thou hast seen God.' This was the motto which the early Christians had, as reported by Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. The message is of universal applicability. 'God that made the world and all things therein ... hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of

the earth. For in Him we live, we move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are all His offspring' (St Paul).

Islam

Islam affirms that the spread of materialism brings about the downfall of great nations. The decline of the Greeks and of the Persians is ascribed to the spread of godless materialism. Theological controversies divided Christendom, and problems of social justice and brotherhood were neglected. Mohammed affirms the unity of God and the brotherhood of man. The Muslim feels deeply man's insignificance, the uncertainty of his fate, and the supremacy of God. Their poets, prophets and preachers enlarged on the abyss between the Creator and the creature. Though Allah is a being without form and without parts, without beginning or end and without equal, He must be described partially at least if He is to be apprehended by man. He is viewed as a personal being, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and compassionate.

If one has to live a truly human life, a religious life, one must surrender one's thoughts and actions to God.

O man, thou must strive to attain to thy Lord
a hard striving until thou meet Him.
They are losers indeed
who reject the meeting of Allah.
They will perish indeed
who call the meeting of Allah to be a lie.
He regulates the affairs,
making clear the sign that
you may be certain of meeting your Lord.

The Koran says: 'Whomsoever He willeth, Allah sendeth astray, and whomsoever he willeth He setteth on a straight path.' His transforming grace is essential for our effort to draw near to God.

The domestication of foreign elements has been in process throughout the history of Islam. While the barbarians relegated Greek thought to a few monasteries, Muslim schools translated Greek classics, absorbed Greek

thought and transmitted it later to the West where, in the twelfth century, it produced a great intellectual revival. We generally say that the European mind is made by three elements: Greek culture with its contribution of science, art and literature; Roman civilization with its code of political conduct, law and institutions; and Christianity. The first two are common to Islam and Christianity and Islam believes that it has perfected and completed Christianity.

Mohammed recognized the fact that each religious teacher has faith in his own mission, and his vision and experience fulfil the needs of his people.

There is not a people
but a warner has gone among them.
And every nation had a messenger.
And every nation had a guide.
And certainly We raised in every nation
a messenger, saying Serve Allah and
shun the devil.
To every nation We appointed
acts of devotion which they observe.
For every one of you did We appoint
a Law and a way.

Interreligious Understanding

If there are similarities in the religious experience of mankind, it only means that a common humanity reacts in more or less similar ways to man's encounter with the Divine. The common points to be found in the different manifestations of religion should not lead us to think that they are organized in each religion in the same way. The manner in which these beliefs are correlated varies from one religion to another. Each religion is a living organization of doctrine, worship and practice, has a uniqueness and individuality of its own and changes as a whole in response to the needs of the age. While therefore we indicate the area of agreement, the distinctive arrangement of the basic presuppositions gives quality to different religions. For our present purpose, it is not necessary to stress the differences which are important and fundamental in some points. Even though each sect of a religion claims to

be the true representative of its specific religious message, yet all the followers of all the sects feel that they are bound together in a unity. As we are trying to overcome the conflict within each religion, where every organized group claims to possess the truth, by the recognition of the unity of religion, even so conflicts among religions require to be reconciled, if religion itself is not to be defeated.

The world has bled and suffered from the disease of dogmatism, of conformity, of intolerance. People conscious of a mission to bring humanity to their own way of life, whether in religion or politics, have been aggressive towards other ways of life. The crusading spirit has spoiled the records of religions.

In future there can be only one civilization in the world, for it is no more possible for different civilizations to live in ignorance of the others. The scientific discoveries which have penetrated all parts of the earth are making the world one though the different civilizations live by and cherish their distinctive principles of life. If the world is to be united on a religious basis, it will be not on the basis of this or that religion but by a cooperation among the different religions of the world. If the different religions strive to achieve their common ideals and seek to understand the differences in a sympathetic spirit, the world will be relieved of the misery and fear which now engulf it. The tradition of opposition to one another should yield to co-operation. The convention of superiority which is natural should not prevent appreciation of other faiths and fruitful interchange among them. If the message of religions is to be articulated in relation to the problems of our age, we must give up the view that any one religion contains the final, absolute and whole truth, and adopt the eastern attitude that the faith is realized in historical patterns, though no one of these patterns should regard

We must ... adopt the eastern attitude that the faith is realized in historical patterns, though no one of these patterns should regard itself as the sole and exclusive truth for all.

itself as the sole and exclusive truth for all. We must be on our guard against the enemies of truth, men of fixed ideas and fanaticism.

'Religion has many doors; the observance of its duties can never be useless' (*Mahabharata*). This view makes for the appreciation of religious knowledge, of the beliefs and practices of other peoples. This understanding makes for spiritual fellowship. With this fellowship, each religion will have scope for full expression. Religious reflection will be stimulated by the knowledge and friendship of others of different religions. We will also have universal ethical standards. Even as the interplay of Jewish, Christian and Muslim in the West has enriched the experience of the West; that of Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian has enriched the experience in the East, so the

cross-fertilization of ideas among the living faiths of the world will tend to foster and enrich spiritual life. The sign of hope is the perpetual youth of religions, the way in which they renew themselves as the world changes.

Arnold Toynbee says:

'The Indian religions are not exclusive-minded. They are ready to allow that there may be alternative approaches to the mystery. I feel sure that in this they are right, and that this catholic-minded Indian religious spirit is the way of salvation for all religions in an age in which we have to learn to live as a single family if we are not to destroy ourselves.'

The choice before humanity is either co-operation in a spirit of freedom and understanding or conflict in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and jealousy. The future of religion and mankind will depend on the choice we make. Concord, not discord, will contribute to the establishment of spiritual values in the life of mankind. 'Concord alone is meritorious', said Asoka. *

❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

Azhwars were Tamil saints who were instrumental in the Bhagavata movement's taking shape. They belonged to the Pallava period (7th-9th century). The Azhwars were twelve in number and belonged to different castes. Most of them hailed from different parts of the present Tamil Nadu and some from the present Kerala. Andal, considered to be the Mira of south India, is also counted among them. Azhwar means 'one who has dived deep in God-consciousness'.

The Azhwar movement ignored the distinction of caste and gender, of knowledge and ignorance. It considered love of God as the chief means to salvation. The devotional outpourings of the Azhwars numbered 4000 hymns. These are called *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*—looked upon as the fifth Veda by the devoted.

Touched by God

These first three Azhwars—Poigai, Bhūta and Pey Azhwars—were known for their apparently mad behaviour—mad in their love of God. God-absorbed and God-intoxicated, they wandered from place to place singing hymns to the manifestations (*arcāvatāras*) of Viṣṇu in different villages in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The three Azhwars met in a place called Tirukovalūr in Mrigandu rishi's ashram. Poigai Azhwar was the first to enter the rather small room, seeking shelter from incessant rains. The Azhwar lay down on the floor and was thinking of the Lord when Bhuta Azhwar entered the room, singing the Lord's praises. Poigai Azhwar got up and addressed Pey Azhwar: 'In this room one can stretch, but two can sit comfortably.' Sitting together the Azhwars were discussing the Lord's glories when there was a tap on the door: it was Pey Azhwar. They said: 'One can stretch, two can sit, but three can stand here.' The three were in

raptures thinking, talking and singing of God, living up to the Lord's words in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.9):

*Maccittā madgataprāṇā
bodhayantaḥ paraspāram;
Kathayantaśca mām nityam
tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca.*

With their thought fixed on Me, their lives absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me, always discussing Me, they derive satisfaction and delight.

The rain intensified and the darkness grew. There was place enough only for three to stand. Suddenly they felt the room becoming squeezey and sensed the presence of a fourth person. They realized intuitively that it was none other than Lord Vishnu Himself—the Lord who had promised Narada that he resides where his devotees sing his glories (*madbhaktā yatra gāyanti tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada*). The Lord blessed them all and left.

He Robbed People to Serve Devotees

Tirumangai was part of the erstwhile Chola kingdom. The commander of the Chola army had a son named Nila ('blue-eyed'). When he was young, Nila received training in archery and in wielding arms. Impressed by his prowess, the king appointed him commander in due course. Vanquishing all the enemies in battle, he came to be known as Parakala ('death to enemies'). The Chola king made Nila king of Tirumangai, a part of his kingdom. Nila was known for his glorious and righteous role. Soon Nila himself came to be known by the name Tirumangai.

Tirumangai was fascinated by a celestial girl brought up by a physician, and asked him for her hand in marriage. The father was too glad about the proposal. The devoted girl, however, made a condition: she wouldn't marry anyone other than an orthodox

Vaishnava.

Tirumangai underwent due initiation and returned to her. She now posed a second condition: He should feed every day 1008 Vaishnavas and drink their *caranāmṛta* (water made holy by the touch of their feet). Tirumangai agreed to it and married her.

Tirumangai stuck to his promise and fed devotees every day. This soon drained his meagre resources. He became a defaulter in his payments to the Chola king of the agreed part of the revenue of Tirumangai kingdom. Tirumangai dodged the king's emissaries and also defeated the commander the king sent to fetch Tirumangai. The king himself then joined the battle but was spared his life by Tirumangai out of reverence for him. The king was amazed at Tirumangai's skill in battle and asked him to remit the dues at a later date when convenient to him. He left a minister of his with Tirumangai.

Not receiving the dues even after a considerable lapse of time, the king succeeded in imprisoning Tirumangai in a temple. Lord Vishnu in the form of Varadaraja in Kanchipuram appeared to Tirumangai in a dream and told him of a hidden treasure in Kanchipuram. Tirumangai went there along with the king's minister. The Lord again showed him the exact location of the wealth. Tirumangai squared his debt to the king through the minister, and retained the balance to feed devotees. The king learnt of Tirumangai's devoted service and donated the entire amount to him, to be used in devotees' service.

With his wealth depleted soon, Tirumangai started waylaying people to keep up his promise to feed devotees. The Lord decided to bestow His grace on Tirumangai. He and his

consort Lakshmi assumed the guise of a newly-wed brahmin couple and set out on the way haunted by Tirumangai. Tirumangai was very happy at this unsolicited prey and crossed the couple's way. Turning a deaf ear to the brahmin's prayers, he and his associates rid them of all their ornaments and left the bride with just the *mangalasūtra* (the ornament worn by married Hindu women). When the brahmin pleaded that the signet ring on his finger was difficult to remove, Tirumangai did it with his teeth.

The looted ornaments now lay in a bundle in front of the couple. Tirumangai ordered his group to remove the bundle. Lo! The bundle was too heavy to lift! Tirumangai reproached them and came forward to lift it himself. No luck! Enraged, he threatened the brahmin: 'You have cast a spell on the bundle making it heavy. What mantra did you use? Tell me that!' The brahmin took him aside and whispered into his ears the famous *aṣṭakṣarī* mantra: '*Om namo nārāyaṇāya.*' After this initiation, the brahmin and his wife vanished from the scene—and the inner eye of Tirumangai opened! He saw Lord Vishnu and His consort Lakshmi flying back to their celestial abode on their carrier Garuda.

Tirumangai cried in anguish repenting for his sins, for having defiled the Lord's person with his teeth. The Lord spoke to him: 'Fear not! Nothing pleases me like the touch of a devotee. I came to open your eyes today. Go to Srirangam and complete the construction of the temple there. Raise the banner of my love and faith, and ascend to my Vaikuntha!' Tirumangai burst forth into hymns deprecating himself for his sensory life, and glorifying the Lord and praying for His grace. *

Love God, and Others through Him

How can God be angry with us? Your babe does many mischievous things: are you angry with that babe? Does not God know what we are going to be? He knows we are all going to be perfect, sooner or later. He has patience, infinite patience. We must love Him, and everyone that lives—only in and through Him. This is the keynote.

—CW, 4.129

Spirituality and the Feminine

PRAVRAJIKA GAYATRI PRANA

I will first go into what the word spirituality means to me and then I will look at five meanings of the word feminine and see in what way spirituality is conveyed within them.

Let's look at the word spirituality. Broadly, it means relating to Spirit. But, what is Spirit? Its root meaning is breath, what enlivens and supports life. Its later meaning—and what we tend to think of nowadays—is the essence or core of anything, specially something subtle, which works in a very powerful and unseen way. Now, if we think of Spirit in this more subtle way, the question comes up: how do we know it exists and how can we discern what is spiritual, or coming directly from the Spirit? How can we experience it directly and make it manifest in our day-to-day living?

Five Criteria of Spirituality

In a way, the history of religion is the attempt to define Spirit and to discover what the word spirituality means. I'm not going to get into any of these theories and practices, but will simply take the plunge and lay before you five criteria of what I think of as spiritual, using the language of human behaviour and psychology. You can judge whether they hold water or not.

First comes unselfishness. What does that mean? In a general way, it means putting the welfare and concerns of others on a par with one's own; or, if one is a saint, above and beyond one's own. Fundamentally, unselfishness rests on an understanding that what is most important about people is precisely the Spirit. It is Spirit which enlivens them and also what we are relating to and serving in them.

Second comes unconditional love. This is a term we hear everywhere nowadays, no

doubt because it is so very, very important. What, however, does it really mean? If we analyse ourselves with true objectivity we can see that just about all our behaviour is motivated by the desire for emotional gratification and control of people or situations. Our willingness to get involved in anything is based on a psychology of barter or competition. I suspect everyone experiences the long-term results of such emotional capitalism and finds them bitter and unsatisfactory. On the other side, if we have ever experienced even a touch of love offered without any motive of bargaining or reward, we also know the joy and the liberating feeling that accompanies it, and the deep urge to love that way ourselves. We have experienced in that moment the joy of the Spirit, uncomplicated by our self-serving desires.

Third is the ability to turn our minds inwards and see who we really are, beyond the hassle of work and the roller coaster of emotion. Our natural tendency is to look outwards and involve ourselves in the unceasing activity of the physical and emotional worlds. All of us know, I am sure, that this can be exhilarating and also extremely tiring and confusing. There are times when we desperately need to be quiet and to find out who or what we are at the core. In the language we are using, we are trying to get to the essence of ourselves, the principle or Spirit, which is where we are in reality grounded. The attempt to reach the inner principle or Spirit is known, variously, as concentration or contemplation or meditation, all of which can be developed systematically. Again, we can develop ourselves in this to the degree that we are in direct contact with Spirit, making it our primary focus and allowing it to guide and influence very directly everything we do.

A fourth criterion of spirituality is the

ability to see our own little worlds, the cosmos and the universe as emanating from and manifesting Spirit. All worlds are interrelated because they are centred on Spirit and animated by it. When we experience things in this way, we can move from our own little world of experience to that of others and on to wider and wider universes, without ever losing our grounding in the Spirit. There is an unbroken chain of interconnectedness. Everything is strung on Spirit like pearls held together on the thread of a necklace.

Finally, spirituality reaches its acme in the ability to see Spirit, not just as interconnecting everything, but fully present in every atom of the universe. Here there is no division whatever between matter and Spirit. Spirit is everywhere, in everything, as everything. There is nothing small and trivial, because everything is Spirit. This is a very, very exalted state of spirituality, one that is reached after long and arduous work; but the fact that there have been people who have lived their lives that way proves that it is possible; a goal that anyone can strive for if they want to plumb the depths of spirituality.

Spirituality and the Feminine

These, then, are the ways I see spirituality. Now, turning to the second element of this essay, what is the feminine, and how does it relate to spirituality? The way I see things, there are always several domains or layers of meaning to everything, giving quite a bit of choice in the field one may work in. In the same way that spirituality has several meanings, so does the feminine. What I'd like to do now is go through five meanings of the word feminine and show how in each domain, as it were, the whole picture of spirituality can be manifested.

The First Domain of the Feminine

Generically, the word feminine refers to the fact of being a woman or female. The irreducible criterion of being a woman is the ability to conceive, bear and nurture children. Bio-

logical motherhood is unique to women and is the primary distinguishing feature of women from men. Furthermore, the vast majority of women become biological mothers, so that this fundamental criterion of femininity applies almost across the board to all women. Finally, true motherhood is a lifelong commitment, absorbing vast amounts of a woman's time, energy and inner resources.

In such a situation, how does the feminine connect up with Spirit? How can women spiritualize the tremendous drama of biological motherhood? Well, I think we all know that motherhood gives endless scope for unselfishness. The ideal mother puts the needs of her children before her very own, especially in their earliest years. Little children are so dependent on their mother: they look to her for food, comfort, protection. How could she not put aside her own preoccupations and throw herself wholeheartedly into nurturing her children? This is more or less an imperative; but it becomes spiritual when one understands that the child is a form of Spirit, that the demanding job of nurturing the child is setting the stage for the child's own spiritual unfoldment. The quality of the nurturing received even by the tiniest infant leaves on it a deep and permanent impression which it carries for its entire life. If we are doing the work of mothering spiritually, the child will absorb that spirituality and will use it to grow on, as royal jelly nourishes a queen bee.

Mothers naturally love their children. But spiritual, unconditional love implies that the child has his or her own inner pattern to unfold. Such love helps the mother refrain from pushing an agenda foreign to the child. This does not mean lack of training and discipline. It means that the genuine inner needs of a growing personality are not suffocated and distorted, hitched to the problems and neuroses of the mother. The mother always must bear in mind that her child is, at the core, Spirit; and that trying to push an agenda can only alienate and distort. I'm sure we all know how excruciatingly difficult it is to love like

this; but it is its own reward when we see our child in turn growing into a person who loves unconditionally.

Motherhood also gives lots of opportunities to turn inwards, perhaps most of all when the child grows up and is ready to fly the coop to his or her own, independent world. This is a notoriously difficult time when a mother can resort to all sorts of traps and subterfuges to hold her 'dear little baby' in her warm, motherly embrace. Only by deep introspection can we become convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that the true nature of 'our baby' is Spirit. Not only that; we, the mothers, are also Spirit. How can there be separation between Spirit and Spirit? Physical and emotional separation are only on the surface; the real, true bond is at a much deeper level—and that we find by turning inwards. A mother who looks on her child in this way forges a relationship that endures and enhances the nurturing and love that went before, in a deeply spiritual way.

How can a mother expand her vision from her child to the world, to the universe? Surely by taking her stand on what she has understood of Spirit through all the previous steps. We can enjoy our child's career, his or her marriage, promotions and ideals and use them to expand our own understanding. Through the eyes of Spirit we see new worlds unfolding before us, with which we deeply empathize. As our children pursue paths so often entirely different from our own, we experience new countries, new cultures, new universes and incorporate them into our own world view. Thus, without moving from where we are, we travel everywhere and feel ourselves interconnected with everyone and everything. We have gone through the heavy work of early nurturing,

the struggle to love without conditions, the challenge of seeing the birds fly away and the process of absorbing all the new ideas and lives that grow up out of our children's careers. If we have steadfastly tried to see everything as coming from and ultimately being Spirit, a time will come when we can see Spirit and Spirit alone.

This is not something that comes with drum rolls and showers of confetti and balloons. It comes very quietly, in fact. In my own life I saw it in my grandmother with whom I lived after the death of my mother. My granny was a Gaelic-speaking peasant from the Outer Hebrides, a woman with only one year's formal schooling, and whose whole life was given to being a soldier's wife and the mother of six children. When I knew her, she was in her late seventies and early eighties. Every afternoon she would sit quietly in our humble living room and there would be an endless stream of visitors eager to talk with her and get the benefit of her wisdom

If we have ever experienced even a touch of love offered without any motive ... we also know the joy and the liberating feeling that accompanies it, and the deep urge to love that way ourselves. We have experienced in that moment the joy of the Spirit, uncomplicated by our self-serving desires.

and loving counsel. The state of spirituality I am trying to describe here was most visible to me on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Although she had had several heart attacks, her great joy was to get up on the weekends before the rest of the household and bring all of us a cup of tea in bed. When she quietly came through the door with the steaming tea, the expression on her face was very serene, very loving, deeply aware of who she was, her mind open to the whole universe and, above all, seeing each of us not simply as her dear relatives, but as Christ, the form of Spirit to which she was devoted. Such experiences, I can definitely say, make deep spiritual impressions on the mind and change one's whole attitude to life. This, then, is what I see as the spiritual

possibilities in the first domain of the feminine, that of biological motherhood.

The Second Domain of the Feminine

The second domain of the feminine is the domain we usually consider appropriate to women's behaviour, that is the domain of emotional sensitivity, imagination, creativeness. This is not an exclusively feminine domain, of course; we all know that many men have excelled here. However, conventionally this is a preserve of women.

I would like to illustrate how spirituality can be manifest in this domain by telling you about an art teacher I worked with from the age of 5 to 14. Her name was Jean and she was a noted artist and curator of a large gallery and museum in Glasgow, Scotland. She was an unmarried woman, belonging to the World War I generation which lost its men on the battlefields of Europe. Early in her career she became deeply interested in developing the creative talents of children and she set up and ran a free art class on Saturday mornings for children, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As I see it, her spirituality was manifest in her unselfish dedication to this work that went on for decades. She often had to deal with troubled and rebellious children, damaged by the backgrounds they had come from. Her ability to create space for each child was, however, phenomenal. She would find out where the interests and enthusiasm of the child lay and foster and encourage him or her to begin development right there. As the children settled into such a warm and supportive environment, their talents began to bloom and stunning results began to emerge. Her students became gold medalists in the annual competitions in the Glasgow area, while the work of the whole class was shown all over the world, including the venerable and prestigious Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. For many of the children, coming from poor, semi-literate and deeply self-despising backgrounds, this was a major turning point in their lives. Her stead-

fast faith in their natural ability encouraged them to greater and greater efforts, more and more self-confidence by which several went on to front rank positions in the art world of Britain. All, however, found themselves by going through the process of working with her. She became, as it were, the supporting ground in which all of this phenomenal activity was going on.

Yet in and of herself, she was always a loving and affectionate person with no big ideas about herself. On a visit I made from the USA nearly twenty years after leaving her class, she went all out to put me up in her simple home. I could understand that for her I was everything. She was interested in all that I was doing (though it wasn't art work), all that I aspired to and, above all, in what I really am. Not only that; she felt the same way about everyone—and that, to me, was the pinnacle of the spirituality she had developed in and through the world of creativity and art.

The Third Domain of the Feminine

I would now like to move on to another aspect of the feminine; this time less conventional. Traditionally, feminine can mean weak and dependent, and we all know why that meaning came about. There have, however, been some women who have been very strong and independent and it is my belief that we should look into what they are about. If even one woman can be strong and independent, any woman can be so and femininity can find expression here also. I have chosen to illustrate this possibility of the feminine with the life of Joan of Arc, whose biography I read just last year.

I know all sorts of things are said about Joan, but my perspective is that this was a woman who dedicated herself to an ideal and stuck to it to the bitter end. She was born in 1412, three quarters of the way through the Hundred Years War, which was in essence due to the English claim to annex and dominate France. Although much more numerous than the English, the French, under unrelent-

ing attack for seventy years or so, were deeply demoralized and exhausted. The heir to the French throne, the dauphin, was weak and cowardly and was hiding in the south of France. Joan, a peasant girl from the north-east, understood the whole problem of her people in her early teens and conceived the idea of liberating her country and crowning the rightful heir to the throne in Rheims, the traditional site of such coronations, though at the moment under the control of the English. So intense was her dedication to this ideal that she totally transcended the fact that she had a female body and no education. This was her form of unselfishness. Her love for her country led her to undergo intense hardships, roughing it with common soldiers and accepting everything as part and parcel of her mission. Her deep intuitive understanding convinced the dauphin that she was a genuine prophet and her burning vision inspired the French army to beat back the English all the way to Rheims, where she did, indeed, preside over the coronation of the French prince. Although she was betrayed into the hands of the English by the French clergy, she never once, in the course of several gruelling months of interrogation—which ended in her martyrdom at the stake—doubted herself or her mission. Indeed, the biggest case against her was that she, as a woman and a devout Catholic, had no right to think for herself, far less to take such drastic action to work out her vision. History, however, has come to another verdict. Her inspired life brought the French back to the battlefield and within twenty years or so the English were gone from the soil of France. She became the patron saint of France and the source of endless inspiration to generation after generation of writers and thinkers, as well as, one would hope, of women who aspire to

be more than ‘clinging vines’.

I believe Joan is a prototype of what women can become. Gender is no bar to embracing high ideals and working them out to a logical conclusion. Joan manifested unselfishness, intense, self-giving love, inner conviction and vision, as well as total identification with Spirit that add up to the hallmarks of spirituality. That she chose to work in a field stereotypically restricted to men is no blot on her spiritual greatness; rather it is a model to inspire other women of the same type.

The Fourth Domain of the Feminine

I would now like to enter another domain in which there have been women of great eminence, albeit less numerous than men. I am referring to the domain of bringing about major evolutionary changes in human culture and society. The woman I have selected here is Teresa of Avila, the Spanish Carmelite nun of the 16th century. Teresa came from an aristocratic background and was educated, by the standards of her day. At an early age she became a nun, thereby committing herself

My idea is: why not expand the repertoire of women? We can be highly spiritual in many domains, not merely those assigned to us by social conventions. Why don't we think over such lives as I have outlined and see what fits us best? Then, let's give it a go!

to a life without dependence on men, money or fame. This is, in fact, a formalized type of unselfishness. It overtly gives up the goals which usually tend to make us selfish. She had an overpowering love of the Spirit which would lead her into deep states of contemplation. The other side of this interior love was that she could relate effortlessly to all, especially her monastic sisters who filled up most of her enclosed life. Now these sisters were less focused on the ideal than she. In fact, they were not really living the ideal life of nuns. They dressed well, ate well, had money and even boyfriends. This state of affairs was due, at bottom, to the bankruptcy of the Roman Catholic Church, which had invested itself for

hundreds of years in the horror of the Inquisition. The inevitable appearance of the Protestants, who repudiated the injustice, mendicancy and terror of the inquisitorial mindset, had siphoned off large areas from the purview of Catholicism, especially in northern Europe. The Church was at a very, very low ebb.

Teresa herself experienced the methods of the Inquisition—though not, of course, its ‘final solution’, as had Joan of Arc. At a very deep, spiritual level, Teresa understood the problem and struggled with herself for some twenty years or so to solve it in her own way. Primarily, she tapped into the deep experience of the Spirit and came to see from that vantage point that she was part of an ongoing process which desperately needed remedial action. Finally, she took the bold step of starting a convent which she ran on the lines of true monasticism and the kind of spirituality it stands for. Despite the fury of her Order, her work was an instantaneous success, and her reforms spread like wildfire all over Spain and eventually Europe. Her work was a major contribution to the purging and spiritual rehabilitation of the Catholic Church.

She enshrined her approach and methods in writing for which she was later made a doctor of the Church. Basically, her vision was of an evolutionary approach to Spirit, beginning with our everyday, selfish selves and ending as perfect transmitters of the Spirit. She encountered pitfalls, struggles and problems, resulting in spiritual satisfaction at every step. In this way, she not only transformed her Order and her Church, but also handed on the ‘recipe’, as it were, for others to follow in her footsteps. Although a woman, Teresa was totally beyond any narrow idea of feminism. She could see Spirit in anyone or any situation. She attracted and trained great men reformers, of whom the greatest was John of the Cross, who carried out her reforms in the male section of their Order, and was, in addition, a poet and mystical philosopher of the highest rank.

Teresa’s life, I think, is an example of spirituality, this time in a less common, more interior, but profoundly real mode which is open to any woman who is attracted to and suited for such a way of life.

The Fifth Domain of the Feminine

Now I am coming to the last and most unusual domain of spirituality, whether feminine or masculine. As I think you may have seen as I am going along, each successive domain of the feminine has been less and less exclusively female; in fact the preceding two domains are more commonly thought of as male preserves. However, women are competent to excel in any domain, provided they are ready and free to play by the rules of the domain. In the domain I want to touch on here, gender is of no account whatsoever because it is not concerned with anything but Spirit itself. By definition, Spirit is the essence of everything, irrespective of gender. Although historical records have dwelt on the stories of men in the area we are in now, there have been women of equal eminence.

I want to speak here of Sarada Devi, an east Indian woman of the 19th-20th century. In my view, she demonstrates a universality and depth that are extremely rare among men or women, but which are touchstones of their possibility in any human being. Sarada was a country girl, born in a good family, spending her days in agricultural and family work. In accordance with the Hindu custom of the time, she was betrothed in childhood. Her fiancé was a man who was so intoxicated by the Spirit that people called him mad. Sarada, however, had such intense spiritual vision that her focus was not on his unusual behaviour and his unsuitability (by ordinary standards, that is) as a husband, but rather on the Spirit that animated him. In this she totally transcended, from the very word go, the usual expectations and demands that women normally make of men. In such a relationship, biological motherhood is irrelevant. Nor, indeed, is there any great ‘cause’ to fight for. Instead,

she had the capacity to see every single person she met as her very own child and unselfishly to go through the whole process of nurturing, loving, freeing, empowering and spiritualizing them.

She and her husband developed a bond of love that totally transcended physical contact or even proximity. She spent much of her time in her village, ministering to her family, while he pursued in Calcutta his rather amazing spiritual explorations and discoveries. Her unconditional attitude enabled Sri Ramakrishna to develop in his own way. Not only that. Her motherly love instilled in her 'children' a sense of exhilarating freedom.

A major turning point in her life occurred when she was sixteen. Her husband worshipped her as the Spirit itself, in the form of the Goddess, to whom he offered his entire being as well as all of his spectacular spiritual discoveries. Can any of us imagine how we would react in such circumstances? It would surely be very, very difficult to maintain our poise. Sarada, however, took all of this very calmly. Her serene poise in such a situation speaks a spirituality grounded in the deepest possible level, a self-knowledge of superhuman depth. She was fully identified with the Spirit and as still as an ocean without a ripple.

Her husband set in motion a huge tidal wave of spiritual reform in India and later in the West through his prime disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Sarada quietly went about her unassuming life; but, after her husband's death, discovered that more and more the leaders of the renaissance were turning to her for counsel and advice. Without missing a beat, she accepted this new role and proved

herself to be the peer of her husband and, in some ways, more practical and effective. Her quiet solutions to major problems kept the movement on a steady course and set a standard that endures and grows, even a hundred years later. She was, as it were, sitting at the centre of an expanding universe, quietly adjusting it and keeping it in balance.

Finally, those who met her knew to the very marrow of their bones that they were Spirit—first and last. There was no doubt about it. Moreover, that Spirit is loving without any strings attached; it is liberating; it is empowering; and finally, it is what is really real. This is a very direct way of experiencing the Spirit. It can come through men or women and in it there is no question whatever of gender or gender roles. It is the essence, without anything else. It is a state of freedom which nevertheless gladly embraces the struggling and the so-called 'ordinary'.

Now, let me summarize what I have tried to say. I have tried to show that Spirit can be manifest in five different domains of the feminine, beginning with biological motherhood, the unique privilege of women, and moving on to areas more or less conventionally 'feminine', but all demonstrated by great women exemplars. My idea is: why not expand the repertoire of women? We can be highly spiritual in many domains, not merely those assigned to us by social conventions. Why don't we think over such lives as I have outlined and see what fits us best? Then, let's give it a go! We have it all within us. And, as a bonus, if we expand our repertoire, men will automatically do so, too. It is a win-win situation, as I see it. *

Every human personality may be compared to a glass globe. There is the same pure white light—an emission of the divine Being—in the centre of each, but the glass being of different colours and thickness, the rays assume diverse aspects in the transmission. The equality and beauty of each central flame is the same, and the apparent inequality is only in the imperfection of the temporal instrument of its expression. As we rise higher and higher in the scale of being, the medium becomes more and more translucent.

—CW, 4.191

The *Atharvaveda*: A Study

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

The most ancient and basic scriptures of Hinduism are known as the Vedas. Derived from the root *vid* ('to know'), they represent a vast body of religio-spiritual knowledge transmitted orally from generation to generation over millennia. Hindu tradition ascribes to the sage Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana, better known as Vyāsa, the systematization and editing of the vast Vedic literature with a view to preserving it for the posterity. He is said to have divided the Vedas into four parts and taught them to his four chief disciples—Paila, Vaiśampāyana, Jaimini and Sumanta. These four Vedas are well known as *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* (vide *Mahābhārata*, 'Ādi Parva', 60.5; *Bhāgavata*, 12.6.50).

The *Atharvaveda*, the last in the series, has also been called by several other names: *Atharvaṇaveda*, *Atharvāṅgīrasa*, *Āṅgīrasa*, *Bhṛgvaṅgīrasa*, *Brahmaveda*, *Bhaiṣajyaveda* and *Kṣattraveda*.

The word *atharvan*, probably derived from *athar*, an obsolete word for fire, might mean 'the priest of fire'. So, Atharvan may be the name of an ancient sage who 'brought fire down from heaven' and started the sacrificial rites on the earth.

In the Hindu mythology, he is described as a son of Brahmā, the Creator, who introduced fire-rituals with *soma* and other materials. He is identified with Āṅgīras and also called Atharvāṅgīrasa. It is also possible that the ṛṣis of the clans of Atharvan, Āṅgīras, Bhṛgu, Atharvāṅgīrasa and Brahman were the *draṣṭāras* of this Veda, that is the sages to whom the various hymns of this Veda were revealed. Hence the other names of this Veda.

The title *Brahmaveda* could have been derived from the fact that it was related to the priest *brahmā*, the fourth of the four priests, the

other three being *hotā*, *adhvaryu* and *udgātā*, connected with the first three Vedas in that order. In a more general sense it can also mean the Veda that helps in the attainment of Brahman.

The two names *Bhaiṣajyaveda* and *Kṣattraveda* have obviously been derived from the subject matter of the Veda, which contains quite a bit of material on *bhaiṣajya* (medicines and treatment) and *kṣattrā* (the warrior class known as the *kṣattrīyas*).

The *Atharvaveda* has some special features because of which it stands a little apart from the other three Vedas, especially the *Ṛgveda*. It deals more with the things here and now than the hereafter, and the sacrifices which are a means to it. A major portion of this Veda is concerned with diseases and their cure, rites for prolonging life, rites for fulfilling one's desires, building construction, trade and commerce, statecraft, penances and propitiatory rites and black magic, though high philosophical ideas—much nearer to the thought pattern of the Upaniṣads—are also found. Even the literary style is more sophisticated. Hence some scholars believe that this work had not been admitted into the comity of Vedic literature for a long time. It was perhaps considered a 'scripture of the masses', not fit enough for admission into the 'elite group'. And its sheer popularity might have forced the leaders of the society into admitting it as the fourth Veda and giving its priests also an honourable place in sacrifices.

For the same reasons, it is opined that this Veda is chronologically later than the other three Vedas. Some modern scholars like C V Vaidya (vide *History of Vedic Literature*, p. 156) assign to it the period 3000 to 2500 BC. But Vedic chronology is a rather hazardous subject and it is very difficult to fix the periods pre-

cisely.

From the ancient times, 9 *śākhās* or branches of the *Atharvaveda* (*Saṁhitā*) are known to have existed. However, only two of them are extant: Pippalāda and Śaunaka. Of these, it is the latter that is available in a complete form.

This Veda is divided into 4 *prapāṭhakas*, comprising 20 *kāṇḍas*. Each *kāṇḍa* is again subdivided into *sūktas*, and these *sūktas* into *mantras*. This gives us 6077 *mantras* in 736 *sūktas* spread over 20 *kāṇḍas* in 4 *prapāṭhakas*. However, due to the different methods adopted in grouping or classifying, the number of *sūktas* given by various scholars have varied from 598 to 759. But there is no difference in the number of the *mantras*.

The last *kāṇḍa*, the 20th, has borrowed heavily (to the tune of 90%) from the *R̥gveda Saṁhitā*. It is opined that the *kāṇḍas* 19 and 20, sometimes termed 'Khilakāṇḍa', are later additions to this Veda.

Coming to the subject matter of the *saṁhitā* of this Veda, we find that there is no systematic division of the subject in the first 12 *kāṇḍas*. The last two again deal with miscellaneous topics. A brief summary of the contents may now be attempted, under eight subject headings:

Bhaiṣajya Sūktas

These *sūktas* which deal with diseases, their causes and cures, show a remarkable insight into the subject of health sciences. That is why this Veda is considered to be the precursor of *Āyurveda* or the science of health and longevity. Sometimes *Āyurveda* is listed as an *upaveda* or a subsidiary of the *Atharvaveda*. These *sūktas* contain many prayers for health and longevity. The various names of the parts of the body given here are indicative of an intimate knowledge of human anatomy. Several diseases like fever, leucoderma, leprosy, jaundice, diabetes, dropsy, skin disorders, troubles of the ear, nose and throat, fracture of bones, diseases of the heart and tuberculosis are mentioned and cures indicated. These diseases are

caused by germs, violation of the laws of nature, anger of deities and malevolent spirits, and sins committed previously. Apart from medicines and physical remedies, use of chants and charms was also in plenty. A deep knowledge of the herbs and their various medicinal properties can be inferred from many *mantras*.

Āyusya Sūktas

These *sūktas* contain supplications for longevity and are to be uttered on auspicious occasions like *caula* (tonsure), *upanayana* (investiture with the sacred thread) and *godāna* (gifting of cows). The desire to live the full life span of 100 years is often expressed. One of the *sūktas* (*kāṇḍa* 17) prescribes the wearing of *rakṣāsūtra* (thread of protection) on the body to attain longevity.

Paustika Sūktas

Puṣṭi means worldly progress and welfare. These *sūktas* generally contain prayers for the blessings of deities like the Maruts, Parjanya and others so that there can be good rains and crops, and works like house-building or agriculture or trade flourish well.

Ābhicāraka Sūktas

If the *paustika sūktas* are intended to bring prosperity, *ābhicāraka sūktas* are aimed at destroying or harming enemies who obstruct our progress and try to destroy us. This is said to be achieved by pleasing or appeasing certain deities and spirits and getting one's wishes fulfilled through them. This technique is called *yātu* or *kṛtya*. The number of such *sūktas* is rather large. Destruction of one's enemies including the lovers of one's spouse, annihilation of evil spirits, mesmerizing others through whom one can get one's desires fulfilled—these are some of the topics dealt with in these *sūktas*. The word *kṛṣṇendrajāla* is sometimes used to indicate the type of black magic rites depicted here. As opposed to this, the auspicious rites described in the *paustika sūktas* are called *śuklendrajāla*.

Prāyaścitta Sūktas

These are concerned mainly with expiatory rites to offset the evil effects that may come as the result of non-performance or wrong performance of religious rites. Omens foreboding evil and the rites necessary to combat them are also described.

Strikarma Sūktas

These *sūktas* deal mainly with marriage, love and allied topics. Rites that help in regaining the lost love of one's spouse are also described.

Rājakarma Sūktas

This section gives an account of the political system that obtained during those days. The king used to be elected by the people. National and social problems used to be discussed by or decided in a *saṃiti*, a parliament of people. The *rājapurohita* (chief priest of the state) had an enviable place in the affairs of the state. Prayers for victory in war and hymns expressing devotion to the motherland given here are highly poetic and moving.

Brahmaṇya Sūktas

These *sūktas* unfold the nature of Brahman, the Absolute. The philosophical ideas given here form a link between those of the *Ṛgveda* and of the Upaniṣads.

God, the Absolute, is designated here by various names such as Kāla, Skambha, Uchchiṣṭa and Vrātya, which are rather peculiar to this Veda. From Him the whole universe emerges and in Him it is established. He is the Lord of the whole creation. The universe has evolved out of Him, because He willed it

thus (vide 19.53.8). The sun is a symbol of His power and is called Rohita, 'the Red One'. He is identified with God Himself. This Absolute is also identified with the Atman.

The word *vrātya* found in this section has nothing to do with the people who had been without Vedic sacraments, the sense in which the word has been used in the *dharmaśāstras*. Here it represents Brahman, the Absolute.

★ ★ ★

The *Atharvaveda Samhitā* gives us an interesting picture of the society of its times. The land in which the people lived extended from Gāndhāra (Afghanistan) to Magadha and Aṅga (Bihar and Bengal). The *varṇa* system had been well established. The first three *varṇas* were called *āryas* and the fourth as *śūdras*. But people lived in harmony. Kings were powerful. Trade and commerce were prosperous though agriculture was their mainstay. There are hints to show that the *brāhmaṇas* were powerful and had sometimes to face the wrath of the *kṣatriya* kings. The cow was highly venerated and *godāna* was considered highly meritorious. There are references to the *rājasūya* sacrifice and wars among kings. The institution of marriage was very similar to that of the *Ṛgvedic* times; so also the obsequial rites.

No *āranyaka* of the *Atharvaveda* has come to light so far. Only one *brāhmaṇa* has been discovered, the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*.

The three well-known Upaniṣads—the *Praśna*, the *Muṇḍaka* and the *Māṇḍūkya*—belong to this Veda.

In conclusion it can be said that the *Atharvaveda* forms an important landmark in Vedic literature. *

The Power of the Spirit

This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself makes of man a God.

—CW, 4.351

Bhikṣukopaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Characteristics of *paramahansa* ascetics

परमहंसाः

अथ परमहंसा नाम संवर्तकारुणि - श्वेतकेतु - जडभरत - दत्तात्रेय - शुक्र - वामदेव - हारीत - प्रभृतयोऽष्टौ ग्रासांश्चरन्तो योगमार्गे मोक्षमेव प्रार्थयन्ते । वृक्षमूले शून्यगृहे श्मशानवासिनो वा । साम्बरा वा दिगम्बरा वा । न तेषां घर्माघर्मो न हि तेषां लाभालाभकलनास्ति । शुद्धाशुद्धद्वैतवर्जिताः समलोटाश्मकाञ्चनाः सर्ववर्णेषु भैक्षाचरणं कृत्वा सर्वत्रात्मैव पश्यन्ति । अथ जातरूपधरा निर्दन्दा निष्परिग्रहाः शुक्लध्यानपरायणा आत्ममात्रनिष्ठाः प्राणसंघारणार्थं यथोक्तकाले भैक्षमाचरन्तः शून्यागार - देवगृह - तृणकूट - वल्मीक - वृक्षमूल - कुलालशाला - ग्रिहोत्रशाला - नदीपुलिन - गिरिकन्दर - कुहरकोटर - निर्झरस्थण्डिले तत्र ब्रह्ममार्गे सम्यक् संपन्नाः शुद्धमानसाः परमहंसाचरणेन संन्यासेन देहत्यागं कुर्वन्ति । ते परमहंसा नामेत्युपनिषत् ॥५॥

5. Then there are ascetics [belonging to the] *paramahansa* class, such as Samvartaka,¹ Āruṇi,² Śvetaketu,³ Jaḍabharata,⁴ Dattātreya,⁵ Śuka,⁶ Vāmadeva⁷ and Hārīta.⁸ They subsist on eight mouthfuls of food and seek liberation alone through the path of yoga. [They take shelter] at the foot of a tree, in a deserted house or in a cremation ground; [they may be] clad or [may remain] unclad; they are not [subject to] righteousness or unrighteousness;⁹ there does not exist for them any subjection to profit or loss; they have rejected both the pure and impure dualities;¹⁰ they look upon a clod (lump of earth), a stone and gold as the same [substance];¹¹ they receive alms from [persons of] all castes, [for] they see only the same divine Spirit (Atman) everywhere. Thus, remaining unclad [lit. as nude as when they were born], going beyond the pairs of opposites [like joy-sorrow and heat-cold], [firmly established in the virtue of] non-receiving of gifts, absorbed solely in Brahman-Awareness,¹² devoted only to the Atman,¹³ moving out for alms [just] for the sake of sustaining life;¹⁴ [they take shelter wherever they find one, be it] in a deserted house, temple, haystack, anthill, foot of a tree, potter's hut, a place where the ritualistic fire (for the *agnihotra* ritual) is kept, sandy bank of a river, a mountain cave, the cavity or hollow of a tree or a piece of land near a waterfall; with minds purified [they contemplate on Brahman] and [therefore] are well on their way to [achieving oneness with] Brahman; [finally,] they give up their bodies, [at the time of passing away] being established in the state of the *paramahansa*,¹⁵ through renunciation [of their individuality and ego]. They are indeed the *paramahansas*.¹⁶

Thus [ends] the Upaniṣad.

Notes and References

1. Samvartaka was a celebrated sage who wrote *dharmaśāstras*, scriptures on dharma.
2. Āruṇi is a sage referred to in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.6.1).
3. Śvetaketu is a sage referred to in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.9.4). It was to Śvetaketu that the great saying (*mahāvākya*) 'tattoamasi, That thou art' was taught.
4. Jaḍabharata (lit. 'inert Bharata'); so called because he remained apparently dull and inactive, being full to the brim with the highest spiritual wisdom. His story is described in the *Bhāgavata*.
5. Dattātreya was the son of sage Atri and was considered an incarnation (*avatāra*) of the Hindu Trinity Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara—three in one.
6. Śuka was one of the most celebrated sages of the Hindu lore. He narrated the *Bhāgavata* to King

Parikṣit. Son of Veda Vyāsa, who was himself considered to be a very great sage, Śuka is known for his unceasing God-absorption and utter lack of body-consciousness arising from the highest spiritual illumination.

7. Vāmadeva was a highly illumined Upaniṣadic sage, who had realized his identity with the entire universe.
8. Hārīta was the son of Yuvanāśva of the solar dynasty (*sūrya varīśa*), from whom descended the Harīta Aṅgīrasas. He was considered a sage of high order.
9. Because they have gone beyond all worldly injunctions and prohibitions or codes of conduct. Upanishad Brahmayogin comments on this statement to say that since they have turned their faces away from both *pravṛtti* (involvement in work in the world) and *nivṛtti* (abandonment of all activity and becoming other-worldly), they have ceased to be affected by joy or sorrow under all circumstances.
10. The construction is rather elliptical. Upanishad Brahmayogin interprets it as follows. It is not their contention that the doctrine of *viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified non-dualism) is pure *dvaita* (dualism), while unqualified *dvaita* is impure *dvaita*—that is to say, they are uncompromising non-dualists, not depending upon any external object whatsoever (for they have realized that the Self is the only Reality).
11. Because of their non-dual knowledge, they have the sameness of vision in all things and beings; for they perceive the same Brahman everywhere.
12. Actually, the text states *śukla-dhyāna-parāyaṇāḥ*, which literally means ‘devoted to bright (pure) meditation’. Upanishad Brahmayogin, commenting on this, invokes the *śruti* passage which equates *śukla-tejo-niṣṭham* or *śukla-tejo-rūpam* (‘devoted to pure light’ or ‘of the form of pure light’) with Brahman. He thus interprets *śukla-dhyāna-parāyaṇāḥ* as meaning *brahma-mātra-bhāvāpannāḥ*, that is to say, absorbed solely in Brahman-Awareness.
13. Devoted only to the Atman, having perfected themselves in disowning (or denying) the non-Atman—Upanishad Brahmayogin’s commentary.
14. They go out for alms provided they are aware of the outside world—Upanishad Brahmayogin’s commentary.
15. Upanishad Brahmayogin gives the following beautiful interpretation of the term *paramahansa-ācāraṇa* (lit. ‘by the conduct of a *paramahansa*’): ‘By the word *hansa* is meant the *paramātman*, non-different from the inner Self. ... That which is *parama* (Supreme) as also *hansa* [in the sense mentioned above] is *paramahansa*, that is to say, *paramātman* [pure and simple] without any external objects etc apart from It. *Paramahansa-ācāraṇa* means “remaining established in It (*paramātman*) alone.”’
16. The idea is that they verily get absorbed in and become non-different from Brahman—Upanishad Brahmayogin’s commentary.

Renunciation the Essence of Religion

The first ideal of this attempt to realize religion is that of renunciation. As far as we can, we must give up. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God will never go together. ‘Ye cannot serve God and mammon.’ Let people try if they will, and I have seen millions of in every country who have tried; but after all, it comes to nothing. If one word remains true in the saying, it is, give up everything for the sake of the Lord. This is a hard and long task, but you can begin here and now. Bit by bit we must go towards it.

—CW, 4.180



Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

Philosophy of the Upanishads. By Paul Deussen; trans. Rev A S Geden. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007, 1999. xiv + 429 pp. Rs 225.

Paul Deussen (1845-1919) was an eminent German indologist who devoted 35 years of his life to the study of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and Indian philosophy in general, and produced many works of profound scholarship and deep insight, like *System des Vedanta, Die Nachvedies che Philosophic der Inder*, etc.

The present work is a reprint of the English translation by A S Geden of *Die Philosophic der Upanishads*, published in 1899 as the second part of his *General History of Philosophy*. Though there are a number of books on the Upaniṣads, Deussen's work retains its significance as one of the earliest, exhaustive, coherent accounts of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads by a western scholar.

The Upaniṣads, according to Deussen, represent 'one of the most remarkable and prolific creations of thought that the world possesses.' He views them as 'the culminating point of the Indian doctrine of the Universe,' and adds: 'This point had been already reached in Vedic and pre-Buddhistic times; and in philosophical significance has been surpassed by none of the later developments of thoughts up to the present day.'

The book is divided into four parts: I. Theology, or the Doctrine of Brahman; II. Cosmology, or the Doctrine of the Universe; III. Psychology, or the Doctrine of the Soul; and IV. Eschatology, or the Doctrine of Transmigration and Emancipation, including the way thither (practical philosophy), preceded by an introductory chapter entitled 'Introduction to the Philosophy of the Upaniṣads'. In the introduction, Deussen gives useful information on the place of the Upaniṣads in Vedic literature, a brief summary of the history of the Upaniṣads, etc. He thinks that while the Upaniṣadic ideas may have originated with the *brāhmaṇas* in the earlier stage, they were chiefly fostered by the liberal *kṣatriyas*, and some of the best exponents of the Upaniṣadic doctrines were kings like Aśvapati and Kaikeya.

Deussen considers the identity or unity of Brah-

man, 'the cosmical principle of the universe', and Atman, 'the psychical principle', as the fundamental dogma of the Vedānta system. All philosophies, according to him, basically rest on the Upaniṣadic concept of the unreality of the universe. The 'necessary premise' for all religions, he says, are: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will. These hold good only if the universe is viewed as mere illusion or *māyā*.

Deussen thinks that 'the Upaniṣads are for the Veda what the New Testament is for the Bible', and goes on elucidating this point further. He distinguishes the Upaniṣad from the Bible and asserts that the Upaniṣad is superior as it views religion as release from ignorance and passage to wisdom, and release from the limitations of existence, while the Bible views it as release from sinfulness.

The main ideas of the four parts of the book are briefly summed up below:

Idealism is the fundamental conception of the Upaniṣads, Deussen repeatedly asserts. He traces the idea of Brahman or Atman from the early anticipations of it in the Vedas, particularly in the *Rg Veda*, through the *brāhmaṇas* and *āraṇyakas*, to the Upaniṣads, to what he calls the 'daring, uncompromising, acentric idealism' reflected in the teachings of Yājñavalkya which is expressed in three key propositions: (a) The Atman is the knowing subject; (b) The Atman as the knowing subject can never become an object for us, and is therefore itself unknowable; and (c) The Atman is the sole reality. This all-knowing Atman or Brahman is the light of lights. He is being and not-being. He is *cit* or consciousness, the eternal knowing subject. He is *ānanda* or the supreme bliss. And He is all these together: *sat-cit-ānanda*. Brahman is the sole reality, and 'there is no second outside of him.' However, this absolute idealism gives way slowly to the sense of empirical reality on the one hand and the traditional belief on the other, and leads to what may be termed as pantheism, which is based on the idea of identity of the empirically real universe with the Atman.

This process of accommodation to the obtrusive sense of empirical reality further advances and ultimately, as it were, puts an end to non-duality or the Advaita concept, resulting in the agnostic Sāṅkhya system. The Yoga system, which has been termed by Deussen as 'practical philosophy', is 'a theistic

modification of the Sāṅkhya system.'

In the second part of the book, Deussen considers Brahman as the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe, and discusses the concepts of free will, the *kalpa* theory of later Vedānta, and the theory of *māyā*. Deussen also gives a brief survey of the doctrine of the Sāṅkhya system.

In the third part, Deussen considers the Vedānta theory of Sāṅkara and his school, and discusses the concepts of *jīvātman* and *paramātman*, and how they evolved from the original idealistic concept of one Soul, the concepts of *manas* and *indriyas*, of the five *prāṇas*, etc. He also gives details of the physiology derived from the Upaniṣads and defines and describes the four states of waking, dream, deep sleep and *turiya* of the Soul.

In the fourth part, he deals with the doctrines of transmigration and emancipation, the concept of the cycle of birth and death, etc. The book closes with a retrospective account of the Upaniṣads and their teachings.

Thus *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* is a remarkably comprehensive book. Deussen illustrates his points through appropriate and copious quotations not only from the major and minor Upaniṣads, the Vedas, the *brāhmaṇas*, etc, but also, as has been said earlier, from the works of some western idealistic philosophers like Parmenides and Plato of ancient Greece and Kant, Spinoza and Schopenhauer of later years, in which he has noticed striking parallels to the Upaniṣadic ideas. In one of the footnotes, he mentions his translation of the Upaniṣads. If the quotations in prose and verse from the Upaniṣads are from his renderings, he deserves great admiration. The catholicity of his mind and its idealistic bias are evident throughout his work. The comparison of the Upaniṣadic ideas with those of the Old Testament and the New Testament are quite significant.

Based on a deep personal study and marked throughout by a penetrating analysis, this work, though first published a little more than a century ago, is sure to prove immensely useful to every student of Vedānta today.

Prof Sarbeswar Das

Former Chief Editor, Publications Wing
Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar

Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Alvars. *S M S Chari*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. 263 pp. Rs 300.

The philosophical contribution of the Alvars to the development of Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta does not seem to be widely appreciated among modern

scholars. This is primarily due to the fact that it is written in classical Tamil and the commentaries on it are mostly in Manipravala...which is not easily understood by non-Tamil speaking persons', says the author, introducing the study. He also feels that 'a balanced and dispassionate approach to the Alvars' hymns need to be made in order to understand properly the philosophical teachings contained in them.' The author tries to achieve this aim within the compass of eight chapters covering various aspects such as the doctrine of ultimate Reality, of God, and of individual Self. There are also chapters spelling out the basic doctrines of sadhana. An important chapter is the one on theistic mysticism which is a fairly lengthy one outlining the general nature of mysticism.

Given such an ambitious and comprehensive aim, it is to the credit of the author that he has managed it with clarity and conviction. Specially the chapter on the doctrine of ultimate Reality seems cogently reasoned with necessary focus on the celebrated figure of Nammalvar. Similarly the chapter on mysticism is interesting, but one gets the feeling that when such an important frame such as mysticism is chosen it would have been better if the author chose a wider theoretical frame drawn from the mystical traditions of different faiths. It is not very clear how 'the mysticism of the Alvars is of a distinctive type.' One would expect a thorough treatment of this important area, since defining mysticism is always a question-begging attempt. It is true that as Mr Chari says 'mysticism for the Alvars may be defined as the spiritual quest of an individual for the direct and comprehensive vision of God culminating in an eternal, uninterrupted divine service.' But this is too general a comment and these qualities are present even in approaches that do not believe in mysticism. The author could have elaborated the implicit ideas since these are important aspects which underlie the book.

Finally the author's observation that '*Tiruvaymoli* is Tamil Vedānta' and needs to be examined is an interesting aspect which is potentially capable of highlighting the role of language in constituting philosophy. One feels that this aspect could have been discussed at length in the light of recent studies of language and sacred studies.

The book however is a very valuable contribution to an important area of Hindu systems of faith and belief. The publishers are to be congratulated for bringing it out in an elegant form. As such it is an indispensable volume to anyone interested in Vaiṣṇavism and the contribution of the Alvars to it.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

Formerly Professor of English
Osmania University, Hyderabad

❧ Reports ❧

Represented. The state of Tripura, by a student of our school in Agartala, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Science Exhibition held in Allahabad from 17 to 23 November 2001.

Opened. A bookshop of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi, at the Ranchi railway station on 24 November 2001.

Visited. Bharat Ratna Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, on 25 December 2001. He was accompanied by Dr Vallabh Kathiria, Minister for Heavy Industries, Government of India. They were received by Swami Jitatmananda, the head of the Ashrama. As Dr Kalam beheld the 9-foot-tall statue of Swami Vivekananda in front of the Ashrama's art gallery, he remarked that he felt more confident and energetic whenever he saw Swamiji's image: 'I feel the power of the words "Arise!



Awake!'" Commenting on certain paintings in the gallery depicting the student (celibate) life in the ancient Indian *gurukula*, Dr Kalam said it was a pleasant surprise for him to know that his idea of imparting to students scientific and value-oriented education in an 'ascetic' environment coincided with the ancient Hindu ideal. Before leaving the Ashrama, Dr Kalam spent a few minutes in the prayer hall, absorbed in contemplation. Emerging from the temple, he said, 'The music was divine. It entered into my heart. I felt

the presence of God within.'

Visited. Mr Laisenia Qarase, Prime Minister of Fiji, Swami Vivekananda College of Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, on 30 November 2001. Earlier, on 27 November, Mr Idrian Simcock, New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji Islands, visited the Mission's Nawaicoba vocational centre.

Inaugurated. Vivekananda Sanskardham—a colony for Gujrat earthquake victims, built in Bharwada village of Porbandar district by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Porbandar, by Sri Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, on 6 December



2001. The colony consists of 30 earthquake-resistant houses, a community hall, a library, a medical dispensary and a school building. Costing about Rs 70 lakh, the project was sponsored by Share & Care Foundation and North Carolina Community, USA.

Inaugurated. The concluding phase of the golden jubilee celebrations of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Katihar, by Srmat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 20 December 2001. Sri Shri Narayan Yadav, Urban Development Minister, Government of Bihar, released the souvenir.

Inaugurated. A two-day symposium on 'Rejuvenation of India—Vision of Swami Vivekananda' at Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai, on 22 December 2001 by Dr R Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.

Commissioned. Newly installed spiral CT scan equipment at the Vivekananda Polyclinic, Lucknow, by Sri Vishnukant Sastri, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, on 28 December 2001.

Organized. An all-Kerala Vivekananda youth convention and national integration camp, by Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama,

Kalady, from 28 to 30 December 2001. The convention was inaugurated by Sri P Radhakrishnan, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Government of India. Sri M A Kutappan, Minister for Youth Affairs, Government of Kerala, and Sri O Rajagopal, Minister of State for Railways and Parliament Affairs, Government of India, addressed the well-attended camp.



Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission

The 92nd Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on 16 December 2001. Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, chaired the meeting. Here is a synopsis of the Governing Body's report issued by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Amidst the important developments during the year 2000-1, the opening of three centres in India, in Belgaum, Jammu and Vijayawada, deserves special mention. A phaco-emulsification unit was commissioned at the medical unit run by our Delhi centre.

Under the Ramakrishna Math, a new temple of Sri Ramakrishna was dedicated at Bagerhat, Bangladesh. The Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence was inaugurated at our Hyderabad centre. A mobile medical unit was started at Ichapur in West Bengal. A new centre was started in Sydney, Australia.

During the year the Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of about Rs 6.55 crore, benefiting nearly 12 lakh people in more than 1700 villages. The massive rehabilitation programme started in Orissa during the previous year was nearing completion after the construction of 303 houses, 3 school-cum-shelter houses, etc. A much bigger rehabilitation programme was launched in Gujarat.

Welfare work by way of scholarships for poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people, etc amounted to Rs 2.19 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 57 lakh people through 9 hospitals and 107 dispensaries including mobile ones and the expenditure incurred was Rs 26.54 crore.

Through our educational institutions—from kindergarten to postgraduate level—nearly 1.12 lakh students were taught, amongst whom more than 33,000 were girls. A sum of Rs 74.57 crore was spent for educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 9.11 crore.

